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[PRIOR ONE PENCE.]



"GOOD EVENING, MR. DITTON, HOW YOU STARTLED ME!" SAID IDA.

## A SISTER'S SACRIFICE.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

TWIN SISTERS.

"I SHALL never again have faith in human nature. Deceived by the man I trusted most, by the woman I loved the best, and now that I find myself on the brink of ruin when too late, she on whose truth I would have staked my life I have proved to be false. I could not stay, but I do not want to be too hard on you. You have your home, but of myself I have left nothing to remind you save a tiny black-bordered card, which, maybe, will turn your thoughts sometimes to one whose greatest fault was loving you too well."

It was an old worn letter, torn with age where

once it had been folded when Myra Trevor first received it, now eight long years since, and how little that world which hovered round the beautiful widow knew of the skeleton which lay hid away in that small ebony box from which she now unearthed it!

She was still young, the usual sadness which pervaded her features only giving an additional charm to her beauty, except at times when she would give way to sudden fits of mirth, when no one was brighter, no one more sought after, than the lovely Mrs. Trevor; and then, when alone, and the reaction would set in, hot blinding tears would roll to her eyes, and she would know too truly how dead her heart had become to the life she apparently so much enjoyed. But at five-and-twenty the spirits will rise above the weight of care, let it be ever so heavy, and there are moments when the delight of the present swallows up all else.

Myra was almost unconscious of the deepening gloom, as the summer day was drawing to a close, whilst with that old worn letter, of which

the writing had become brown with age, still in her hand, she sat dreaming on in the past; but the rustle of a silk dress, accompanied by the patter of a high-heeled boot on the tessellated floor without falling on her ear, the same was hastily restored to the desk, of which she as speedily turned the key, when the door of the room in which she was seated was opened.

"Why, here you are!" said a cheerful voice; as another Myra in face and form entered, "I have been looking for you all over the house; and all in the dark, too, I declare. Won't you have the gas lighted?"

"No, dear, not just yet," was the reply as she returned her sister's caress,—who, advancing, had thrown her arms around her neck. "You know how fond I am of the twilight, and see what a lovely evening it is!"

Ida turned to where the sun was sinking in the west, now only partly visible through the thick foliage, whilst the clouds above, purple and red, became gilded by his setting rays.

"Yes, it is very beautiful and all that," she

said ; "but really, dear, after a journey to town and back, I feel I require something more substantial to feast on than the glories of a July sunset."

"I have no doubt you do," her sister replied, smiling, as she rose to give directions that supper should be served at once, at the same time, with a kiss, bidding Ida divest herself of her walking costume whilst the same was preparing.

"Did you have a pleasant day, Ida?" she asked, when a few moments after that young lady re-entered the room where, the gas having been lighted, a servant was engaged in setting the table.

"It was rather too warm, dear," was the reply, "and the whirl of busy London seems to confuse one so after the quiet of our home nest; but I managed to get through my business, and should have been back two hours earlier had not—"

Here she paused until, the last dish having been placed on the table, Myra told the girl she could leave the room, when turning to her sister she awaited the conclusion of her sentence.

"Had I not accidentally come across George," she added.

"George!" the other exclaimed whilst the knife and fork she was holding fell with a clatter on the china plate, "he in London! and he promised me so faithfully—"

"Yes, dear," Ida said before she could finish, "I know he did; I know what you would say, Myra, but you must not be so hard on him. Poor fellow! he could not leave England; he had no money."

"Had no money! Could not leave England!" Myra repeated; "tis false, Ida, I gave him two hundred pounds myself, thinking, after all the misery I had suffered for his sake, in this, at least, he would have kept his word. What is he doing now?"

"Nothing," Ida returned, "He has tried hard, Myra, I am sure he has, but no one will employ him without a reference, and he asked me if you would speak for him."

"I speak for him! Ida, are you mad?"

"No, dear, no," Ida returned, as rising from her seat she threw herself at her sister's feet; "but I beg of you, darling, for my sake, for the sake of our dead parents, to give him one more chance. He has suffered so much, Myra."

"And have I not suffered more?" Myra asked.

"I know you have, dear, but eight years is so long a time, and not to forgive."

But Myra made no answer, further than to pass her hand lovingly over the fair head of the suppliant, whilst her eyes became suffused with tears. She could not speak, her mind returoring to what had been her portion during that eight years which had passed since the day when she heard the door close, and her love, her life, went from her, leaving nothing behind him but the letter which only a short hour since she had taken from its resting-place, to read again those words which were indelibly impressed upon her memory. How many things she thought, whilst struggling 'twixt love on the one hand and the great wrong which had been done her on the other, may have happened since then! There was nothing now to lose; she could not suffer more than she had done.

"Get up, Ida," she said at last; "on one condition I will do as you wish."

"And that is, dearest?" asked the girl, as she imprinted kiss after kiss on her sister's hand.

"That George never darkens my door. I will help him for this, the last time, although my conscience tells me I am doing wrong; so now, dear, finish your supper, and let the subject drop, for it is far too painful a one to dwell upon." And Ida arose, throwing her arms around the neck of the other, her tears mingling with her own, as a knock resounded on the outer door, and a few moments later a little lady was ushered into their presence.

"I must apologise, Mrs. Trevor, for calling at such an unearthly hour," said the new-comer; "but I knew you wouldn't mind me; and I felt so fearfully lonesome, and having received a

letter this morning from my brother Charles, respecting a young man he was about to take into his counting-house, I thought I would pop over and hear what you knew about him, as he says he was in the employ of your late husband; and so doing would save Charles a lot of trouble."

For the moment the colour fled from the face of Myra, but by the time her visitor was seated in the chair which her sister had offered her she had recovered her self-possession.

Miss Dilton was a maiden lady, her father, whose fortune she inherited, having amassèd the same in a large woolen establishment, which business had descended to his son, on his decease; who, when his arrangements permitted of his doing so, invariably spent his spare time with his sister.

The Hollies, as their place was called, was only divided from the small villa which Mrs. Trevor occupied by the road which ran between, whilst it was entirely hidden from the same by thick foliage, which, as a belt, surrounded the extensive grounds, in the midst of which the house itself stood.

Being in the neighbourhood of Hampton Court the distance from town was but short, but sufficiently far to cut off any connection with "the shop," all mention of which was strictly prohibited when Charles Dilton set his foot on the deep pile carpet in the Holly drawing-room; whilst the best people were ever to be seen in the reunions, on which Miss Dilton prided herself, and not without reason, on being the most pleasurable possible.

She was a little, wiry, active woman, who, though verging on fifty, had lost none of the love of the excitement of life, even feeling herself young again in the midst of the youth of both sexes, with whom she loved to be surrounded, and no one gave such delightful balls—nowhere were there such jolly parties as at The Hollies.

She was extremely attached to the two sisters, looking upon Myra as much too young and handsome to remain a widow, thus making it her business to find not only an eligible party for her, but for her sister's also.

She had even hinted to her brother it was time he thought of marrying; after which she would extol the beauties and graces of their neighbours; but Charles was a confirmed bachelor, and only laughed when the little lady suggested such a step on his part.

"Charles won't be home till Saturday," she said, when, after having fully explained the purport of her visit, Myra had told her that George Merrick had lived with her husband some years ago, when he left to go into business for himself, but unfortunately failed, "so I shall write and tell him what you say! Of course he was trustworthy!" but Myra's reply was inaudible; when a servant entering with a letter, Miss Dilton rose to leave.

"Thinking about Charles's business I almost forgot the most particular object of my visit," she said; "and that is to ask you and Ida to join my garden party on the twentieth. Now, no refusal," she laughed, seeing a look of hesitation on the face of the former, "for if we are only blessed with a fine day it will be a delightful affair, no end of nice people, and a good sprinkling of the military with a regimental band."

"Your parties are always delightful, Miss Dilton," said Ida, holding the hand of their visitor, as she bid her good-bye; when, the invitation having been fully accepted, the little lady tripped from the house, the sisters watching her from the window as she crossed the road, and disappeared within the shelter of her own domain.

## CHAPTER II. THE PETE AT THE HOLLIES.

It was long that night, after Ida's fair head was calmly resting on her pillow, that Myra sat by the open window allowing the soft summer breeze to play on her temples, so hot as she pressed them tightly with her burning hands.

"Have I done right?" she ruminated. "Oh, George, if you should fall me this time Heaven

forgive you;" and then burying her face in her hands, scalding tears forced their way through her white fingers; but they were tears which seemed to give her relief, for after awhile she arose, closed the sash, and drawing down the blind commenced to dress.

It was then that her eyes alighted on a memorial card enclosed in an ebony frame, which hung over the mantel-shelf, speaking to her of a baby-girl which for two short years had been the light of her life, and then had passed away, just as that other great sorrow had fallen upon her, which seemed to swallow up all else besides; but the chill air of the early morning making her limbs numb and cold, she turned from the same, soon endeavouring in the unconsciousness of sleep to forget her grief.

The twentieth was close at hand, and the next day Ida drew her sister's mind from brooding over past troubles, to the momentous question of what their toilettes should be for the occasion.

It was true they were not rich, and could not afford any great outlay in the way of costume; but on the eventful day there were none more daintily attired than the twin sisters, whose fairy beauty showed to advantage in their blue and cream dresses, with the folds of lace, amid which nestled delicate tea-roses.

"My dear, you look lovely!" said Miss Dilton, as she advanced to meet them on their arrival; herself very radiant in a cardinal dress, relieved with black lace.

The day was driving a sky of deepest blue, cloudless save for a heavy mist which now and then passed, covering it as with a gossamer veil. A large marquee had been erected in the grounds, from which flags of every hue floated in the air, while smaller tents were arranged around, amid which the guests strolled to the strains of the band, the sun shining down in splendour on their magnificent toilettes.

"Oh! Miss Dilton, who are those pretty girls?" an officer asked, as Myra and Ida, with the clergymen of the parish, passed by. "I wish you would give me an introduction."

"With pleasure," replied the hostess. "They are Mrs. Trevor, a young widow, and her twin sister, Mrs. Emberidge. Here they come; and as their clerical friend moved aside to speak to someone else, Miss Dilton led the Captain towards them.

Captain Outram was a man of about thirty, considered very handsome in the regiment to which he belonged, and much sought after by ladies with marriageable daughters, and young ladies whose hearts in most cases became enamoured of his masculine beauty; but the Captain himself received all the attentions thus bestowed on him in the most nonchalant style; and as he deigned to make himself as charming to one as the other of his fair friends, he came to be considered by all as a non-marrying man.

"Will you allow me to take you in to lunch?" he asked, as after a few minutes chat Miss Dilton prepared to marshal her guests to the centre marquee, where a royal collation awaited them; and Myra, accepting his proffered escort, they proceeded to the same, whilst Ida followed on the arm of another warrior.

"Excuse me," he said, when they had ranged themselves on each side of the long table, which ran from end to end of the tent, "do you come from Devonshire, Mrs. Trevor?"

Myra raised her eyes for a second, then lowering them to her plate, became intent on the mutilation of a chicken's wing, as she answered the Captain's question.

"My parents resided at Mount Redford, near Exeter," she replied; "but when they died the establishment was broken up, and we came to London. But why do you ask?"

"Because I had an idea I had seen your late before," he answered. "I have such a recollection of features that a face once seen is seldom forgotten by me; and I remember yours, although it must be ten years now since I saw it beneath a bridal veil. My regiment was quartered at Exeter at the time, and having nothing else to do I sauntered into the cathedral as you were leaving the altar. Am I not right?"

"I should have thought I had become much

changed since then, Captain Outram," she said ; "for in ten years one sees so much trouble ; and to lose my husband was a great sorrow to me."

There was a slight falter in her voice, and feeling he was treading on delicate ground, Captain Outram dismissed the subject ; only hoping, as they again emerged into the sunlight, that he might be allowed to call on her at a future date.

It was all very joyous and delightful, as Miss Ditton's assemblies ever were ; that little lady, the most charming of hostesses, and even Mr. Charles, forgetting business for the day, giving himself up to the enjoyment of the moment, only one thought of the shop entering his mind, when later on he had become the companion of Myra.

"I have engaged that young fellow, George Merrick, Mrs. Trevor," he said, "wholly on what you said of him, as it in part corroborated his own story. But I should feel more satisfied if I knew what he had been doing with himself since he was in your late husband's office."

"Did he not explain it?" Myra asked.

"He had been abroad, he said, but failed in what he undertook."

"I believe that is true," she replied ; but was so thankful when, at that moment, Ida came up, and so stopped the conversation.

"It is getting late, Myra," the latter said ; "and as Miss Ditton insists on our returning for the ball, don't you think you had better have a little rest, you look so weary!"

The sun was slowly sinking in a bed of gold as the guests began to depart ; the notes of the band, in some dreamy waltz, to the last speaking to them of the delightful hours they had spent.

The little hostess had retained a few for dinner, and later on the grounds were to be illuminated for the evening fête.

"Allow me to escort you and Miss Etheridge to your own gate, Mrs. Trevor," Captain Outram said, advancing to where the girls were taking a temporary leave of their kind friend.

Miss Ditton was much attached to her near neighbours, never missing an opportunity in which she thought to advance their interests.

"Now, that would be a splendid match for Myra!" she said to her brother, as she watched them move down the lawn. "Captain Outram, not a better family in England, and heir to a large estate in Dorsetshire."

"Match-making again, Maria!" laughed her brother. "I do believe you'll find me a wife yet!"

"Well, you might do worse than marry Ida," she laughed. "But there! I have lost all patience with you."

And she moved to receive the adieux and congratulations of departing guests, failing to notice the colour which, like a girl's, suffused the face of the former.

"Ida!" he mentally ejaculated, "pretty Ida! don't be a fool, Charles Ditton." And then, having dispensed this salutary advice, he advanced through the walks, where Chinese lanterns and coloured lamps were being already lighted for the evening's entertainment, to the steps which led into the house.

### CHAPTER III.

#### DECEIVED.

The glorious summer was gliding peacefully away, during which Ralph Outram had become so frequent a visitor to the sisters that his coming began to be looked upon as a customary proceeding—a proceeding which Miss Ditton inwardly commented on, as falling in with her views precisely. Whilst Myra, little thinking of the danger into which she was drifting, shut her eyes to the fact, until too late she became conscious of the misery which awaited her.

And Charles, who heard from his sister, whenever he put in an appearance, how matters were progressing, became less and less present at the Hollies. So that it created quite a sensation when, one day early in October, he drove up post-haste to that residence.

Miss Ditton was calmly enjoying her morning paper when he entered, a white terrified look on his usually urbane countenance, whilst his hand shook visibly as she rose to receive him.

"Good heavens! what is the matter, Charles?" she asked ; "you are like a ghost ; what has happened?"

"Plenty," he answered, whilst taking the chair she had pushed towards him, and requesting her to ring for some brandy-and-water.

"Anything wrong in the city?" she asked.

"George Merrick has decamped," he answered, "after embezzling moneys amounting to over a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds!" his sister repeated.

"Yes, but it is not the money," he replied ; "the loss of that I could have withstood, but—and here he paused.

"But what, dear?"

"Why should Mrs. Trevor have deceived me in his antecedents, knowing full well, as she must have done, that he not only robbed her husband to a great extent, but was a returned convict?"

"Never, Charles!"

"It is true, Maria, which I have unfortunately proved when too late," was his reply.

"What do you intend doing?" she inquired, whilst pouring out a tumbler of brandy-and-water, which her brother eagerly swallowed.

"Do! Prosecute, of course," he answered.

"Well, I will never believe Mrs. Trevor knowingly deceived you, and I shall go over myself this morning and just tell her what has occurred," acting on which determination Miss Ditton rose, telling her brother to stay where he was until her return.

"Tell her, Maria," the latter said, as she was about to leave the room, "that I will avoid her name being brought into the case if possible."

The sisters were together trying some new music when their little friend was announced. Myra rising from the piano to give her a cordial reception, when she became puzzled at the expression on the face of the other.

"I hope nothing is amiss, Miss Ditton!" she said, grasping her hand. "You look as if something dreadful had happened."

"Something very unpleasant has occurred, my dear; but I am quite sure you are not to blame in the matter," the latter replied. "Let me sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

"You know George Merrick, the young man—but what is the matter, Myra? You are as white as death," Miss Ditton exclaimed, for it was true. Like a flash of lightning the object of the little woman's early call, and the cause of her excitement, passed through the mind of Mrs. Trevor, which made the colour forsake her face, whilst her heart throbbed tumultuously beneath her bosom.

"You cannot think how grieved I am this should have occurred," she faltered, when Ida, having made an excuse for her sudden pallor, Myra listened to the end of her friend's story.

"What does Mr. Ditton intend doing?" She spoke low, so low that the words were scarcely audible ; but Miss Ditton could not fail to notice the anxiety in her tone, and putting the same down to the fear that she might have of her name being brought into the matter, the little lady hastened to assure her of what her brother had said.

With a strong effort Myra so far controlled her feelings that when, a short time after, the former took her leave she betrayed no more anxiety than was natural on the occasion, arousing no suspicion in the breast of her friend, who considered her emotion due only to the part she had unfortunately had in recommending so undesirable a personage.

"She has been deceived as much as you have, Charles," she said, when seeing her brother on her return, "and is terribly upset."

And Myra—no sooner had the door closed on her visitor than her fortitude gave way ; when, burying her face in the pillows of the couch on which she was seated, she gave vent to the grief which was almost breaking her heart.

"Oh, mother! mother!" she cried, "could you have foreseen this would you have left me such a burden to bear?"

And then, as though her sorrow had exhausted itself, she sank into a peaceful calm, Ida watching by her side, giving such words of comfort as she alone could give who knew so well the extent of that fearful trouble, until when the heavy lids drooped gently over the aching eyes, the long lashes on which tears still lingered to tell of those which had been shed, she arose quietly, her own stronger nature combating against the blow her sister lacked the strength to withstand.

Out into the sunlight, out into the open air, just freshened with the first breeze of autumn, Ida felt her spirits rise above her troubles, whilst she rebelled against the fate which like a millstone had hung this trial round their youthful necks, ever casting a shadow over the brightness of their young lives.

Seating herself beneath the branches of a large mulberry-tree which grew at the extreme end of their garden, she made pretence to read the book with which she had furnished herself when she left the house ; but her thoughts flew anywhere but on the page which lay open on her lap, when the light fall of a footstep on the soft grass aroused her attention, and raising her eyes she saw Captain Outram advancing to where she sat.

"The servant told me I should find you here, Miss Ida, and as she appeared to suggest by her manner that I had better do so than wait for you in the drawing-room, I conclude she acted according to your wishes!"

"Yes," replied the girl, cordially shaking the officer's hand, "my sister is not very well, and I told Mary on no account to let her be disturbed. But don't look so awfully serious, it is nothing particular, only a slight headache!" and she smiled as she watched the expression on the face of her companion.

"I am so sorry," he said, very ruefully, "and I am to be prohibited from seeing my—Mrs. Trevor, to-day?"

"I don't know exactly," she replied, "but if you are very good—with a saucy smile—"I will go and see if she is awake." But Myra begged that she might be left alone ; she felt that she should give way did she see him then ; and an instinct she could not deny, which now had devolved itself into a dreaded fear, told her why it was that Ralph Outram had become so constant a visitor ; and then the cry as of a wounded deer broke from her lips, as she recognised the fact which like a grim spectre stood betwixt her and her life's happiness.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### DESPAIR.

IDA had so far recovered herself as to be able to receive Ralph when he called the following morning. Ida had gone to the village to make a few purchases, so that the former was alone when the Captain made his appearance. She did not return until noon, but when she did so, just as she reached the gate which entered on the path leading to their house, she met him coming out.

"Have you seen Myra?" she asked, as she took his outstretched hand ; and then, while awaiting his reply, she raised her eyes to his, to see there such agony depicted as she never hoped again to witness.

"I have," he answered, "and learnt all."

"All!" and Ida looked with wonderment in her large blue eyes.

"Yes," he replied, his voice trembling, "and may Heaven sustain her, my darling, and help me. Heaven bless you, Ida!" and then, with a faint effort at a smile, he left her standing there, whilst he passed out.

Ida watched him down the lane, with pity in her heart ; and then she turned to where Myra awaited her in their little drawing-room, where they together passed so many happy hours.

"Oh, Myra, dearest, don't sob like that!" she said, throwing herself on her knees beside the couch where her sister lay with her head buried in the cushions. "You cannot know ; eight, nearly nine years ago, and no sign. Why should you wreck your life's happiness on such a piec-

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for you do love him, Myra, do you not, dearest?"

"Love him! Oh, Ida, my heart will break, but better than that I should bring dishonour on him!"

"And you told him all, Myra?" Ida asked.

"No, dear, I could not bring my lips to tell him that, but I told him of the barrier which a cruel fate had raised between us, and then, as my heart went forth to him, I lost my strength would fall me, and I bade him leave me. Oh, Ralph, Ralph! and I loved you so dearly."

And Ida remained by his side. She knew it would be better that her grief had full vent, and then she would awaken to the knowledge that it could never be to her otherwise than a dream, till time, the curer of all ills, would may be realize to her the happiness which as a shadow had passed from her grasp, or let it pass from her mind for ever.

And so it was. The first passionate outburst of her grief over, Myra became calm and resigned. She rarely mentioned Ralph's name, and to his many written entreaties that he might still visit as a friend, she repeated her wish "that for the present they should not meet."

Ida even began to feel her buoyant spirits flag beneath the general depression, and she felt almost angry with Ralph for not letting things go on in the ordinary way.

"But it is just like the men," she mentally ejaculated, as she stood looking over the gate, a few evenings after, to the distance beyond, as though there to find a solution of her difficulties.

"I do hate men."

"Collectively or individually, Miss Ida?" and Ida started, on suddenly becoming aware that her words had been overheard, as Charles Ditton, whose footsteps she had failed to notice, so absorbed was she in her reverie, appeared before her.

"Good evening, Mr. Ditton, how you startled me!" she said, without referring to the question he asked.

"So you hate men, Miss Ida?" he laughed.

"Pray in what way has the sex offended you?"

"Oh! I don't know," she replied, smiling,

"but they always seem to get one into trouble."

"I hope it is not so in your case," he said, looking into her fair face; "but I certainly must say one of the community has brought me into a good deal just now."

"You are alluding, I suppose," Ida answered, "to your late manager, George Merrick. What are you going to do in the matter, Mr. Ditton?"

There was such anxiety in her tone that Charles looked up in surprise.

"Well, you know there is an old saying, 'Catch your hare before you cook him,'" he said, "and that is just how the case stands with me at present."

"Do you mean he has escaped?" she asked, excitedly.

"For the present, yes," was the reply, "but we are sure to have him in the end."

And then a shadow of trouble passed over her countenance not unnoticed by her companion.

For several seconds he stood watching the colour as it came and went from her face, whilst the trees coughed above their heads, and the birds whispered to each other in the branches on high.

"Naturally you take some interest in this young man!" he said, after a pause; "but, tell me truly—were you or your sister aware of his real character when he was managing clerk in Mr. Trevor's office?"

He looked keenly at her as she stood there, the colour forsaking her face now, leaving it white as marble in the gathering twilight; but no words escaped her lips—those bright young lips which she could not bring to tell a lie.

"I am answered," he said, after a time, seeing her hesitation, and would have passed on had not Ida stayed him.

"Oh! Mr. Ditton," she said, "can you ever forgive us? But he promised so faithfully, and—if you knew all, I think you would have acted as we did."

He turned; her eyes were no longer lowered, but raised to his imploringly, whilst hot tears rained down her cheeks.

"What was he to you?" he asked, sternly, almost savagely; "perhaps a lover?"

"No! no!" she cried, "don't think that, Mr. Ditton, only the world has been against him somehow. I don't think he is altogether bad—indeed I don't."

"A strange way of putting it," he said, in a softer key; "and I suppose you mean if you could you would save him now?" then moving nearer, until his hand touched hers as it rested on the uppermost rail. "Tell me, I—Miss Etheridge, would it please you were I to withdraw from this prosecution?"

She felt the hot blood rush to her temples, as raising her eyes she met his, bent with such an expression on her own, that she could not mistake the feeling which was causing him thus to waver in his resolution, and the words she would have spoken died on her lips.

"Don't thank me," he added, "I know what you would say," but whilst allowing the hand he had taken to remain within his own, in that brief moment Ida had learnt a strong man's secret—she knew why it was that George Merrick would be safe.

"Go in, now," he said; "see, the dew is falling, and your dress is quite damp! Good-night—my darling!"

He had stood looking at her, as though unwilling she should go from his sight, a mixture of love and dread filling his thoughts, and then the last words broke involuntarily from him, when a sudden rustle in the adjoining thicket caused both to start.

But although they listened intently for some moments they heard no more, only the soft rustle of leaves in the evening air; and then, with one more good-night, Charles Ditton passed to his home on the other side of the way, his thoughts full of the girl he had left leaning on the gate beyond.

Unconscious of the deepening gloom gathering around, until it covered her as with a thick mantle, or of the dew which caused the bright curls on her forehead to fall damp and straight, Ida still remained watching his receding figure until she lost it in the trees and shrubs, whilst love for the first time entered her heart; and then, in all the happiness of her new-born treasure, she was about to turn, forgetful for the moment of all but that which was speaking to her of future bliss, when the grim figure of a man arose before her in the dark.

A half-uttered scream escaped her, and she would have fled, had not the latter arrested her footsteps.

"Hush, Ida!" he said, "don't you know me?"

She turned, and in that moment she knew but too well that she dare not drink of the cup of happiness which she had but so lately raised to her lips.

## CHAPTER V.

### A STRANGE WOMAN.

"Do not cry so, dear!" It was Myra, who, now forgetting her own sorrow in that of her sister, was stroking the fair head, as it lay in her lap, whilst the latter sobbingly told her the events of the preceding evening.

"Oh! let us go away, Myra, dear!" she cried; "abroad—anywhere away from here—away where this shadow cannot for ever be thrown over our lives."

She raised her face, down which the tears were still streaming, whilst for a moment a look of rebellion passed over her countenance when she added, "I will not stay to have my existence made a misery if you will—to be made old before one has scarce tasted the pleasures of life. I don't see the fun in it; it is perfectly ridiculous. Why should we, Myra?"

"Do you think we should be happier away from here, Ida?" Myra asked, her sad eyes meeting those of her sister; "If so, dearest, we will go for a time. What do you say to the south of France for the winter?"

"Oh! I should like it so much," was the reply; and so it was arranged that as soon as practicable they were to close the villa, which

they would leave in the charge of a caretaker during their absence.

Previous to their departure there was much to be arranged, and several journeys to town were necessary for that purpose, whilst during the weeks which intervened they kept their intentions wholly to themselves, not until a few days previous to their leaving even telling Miss Ditton of their plans.

In the meanwhile Charles Ditton, instead of prosecuting his search for the absconding manager, much to the chagrin of the police and astonishment of his sister, put every obstacle he could in the way of that search being effective, until at last all steps in the matter were abandoned. He no longer remained at his chambers in town, as he had been accustomed to do, but would return to the Hollies each night, ever lingering at the entrance leading to Mrs. Trevor's residence, when with a sigh and a troubled care at his heart, he would move towards his sister's home.

"No, no," he would say to himself, "I must be mad to think that she would link her young life with mine; but why should she plead for that scamp? There is but one reply, fool that I was to think otherwise;" and then, kicking the dead leaves which lay in his path, he would crunch them beneath his feet, like the hopes he had once so fondly cherished.

Thus matters were, when he was startled on his return from town one day to hear from Miss Ditton that Mrs. Trevor and Ida were going abroad almost directly.

"I can't think what has come to Ida," she continued, as her brother scarcely seemed to hear her communication. "I never saw a girl so altered in all my life, and I believe, from what Myra says, it is her doing that they are going away; but are you listening, Charles?"

"Yes, yes," the latter answered, weariedly; "you must excuse me, Maria, but I feel so tired;" and, in truth, she thought how tired he did look, his face drawn and careworn, with deep lines which had no right to be there.

"Get to bed early, Charles," she said, forgetting in her anxiety for her brother all else, whilst she recommended what was her favourite specific for all complaints.

"You can't have any one more suitable than Mrs. Baxter, my dears," Miss Ditton said, when, on her visiting the sisters a day or two after, they asked if she could recommend anyone in the village whom they could trust to take care of the villa; "she is a widow, poor thing, and it would be quite a godsend to her to live rent free with a few shillings besides."

"Then we will see her at once," said Myra, on the little lady telling them exactly where she was to be found.

It was a pretty cottage to which they were directed, over which, in its season, the wisteria would hang its weight of blossom, almost hiding the two windows it possessed in front from view.

Their summons was quickly answered by the woman herself, who with a spotless white apron and snowy cap, after the French mode, appeared before them; but their astonishment was great when, on stating their business, Mrs. Baxter peremptorily refused to accept the situation.

"Why, Miss Ditton led us to suppose you would be quite glad to do so!" Myra said, not a little annoyed.

"I am very sorry, miss—ma'am—I mean," she said, correcting herself, "but it is impossible I can leave my home just now."

"We thought you had only yourself," Ida chimed in, "and could give up your house at a week's notice!"

"Oh! yes, I am a lone woman, that's true," said Mrs. Baxter, colouring to the roots of her grey hair, "and I am sorry I can't accept your offer, but I know of some one who would, I know, be glad of the job," and taking the names and address of the said party the sisters were about to turn from the cottage, when they became conscious of the window above their heads being cautiously opened, and on raising their eyes to the same it was speedily closed, whilst they could only faintly discern the head of a man as it was drawn within.

The movement was not lost on Mrs. Baxter,



who now turned as white as she had a few moments previous become red, and it was evidently a relief when she found she could close the door on her visitors.

The woman she had named, however, turned out more satisfactorily, and although there appeared some mystery in connection with the former, they came to the conclusion that it only rested with herself, and took no further heed of it.

They had turned in the direction of home, both deep in their own thoughts, when the sound of horse's hoofs came so near that it caused them to start, and on turning round it was Captain Outram, who having seen them in the distance had followed on.

He and Myra had never met since that day when his hopes had become shattered, and he had gone from her presence with a dull pain at his heart, with a full resolve to live down a passion which had become his very life; but as his eyes met hers he knew how fruitless was the attempt, although even then he feigned forgetfulness of a scene which would live in his mind so long as memory lasted; but when they told him of their intended departure such sadness came into his hazel eyes that Myra could not resist the entreaty he made, that he might bid them a farewell visit before they started.

Alighting from his horse, he walked with them down the lane leading to their home, now strewn with autumn leaves, whilst in the branches overhead the wind soughed and sighed, as though mourning the bright summer days so quickly past.

And long after he had bid them good-bye, whilst his hand-pressure was still warm upon her own, Myra stood straining her weary eyes to catch the last glimpse of his figure, never stirring until the sound of his charger's tread had died in the distance, when, leaning on the arm of Ida, she turned her eyes dim with unshed tears.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN UNEXPECTED MISSIVE.

The next few days were so fully occupied in filling cupboards, which were to be locked, with the many little nick-nacks and costly atoms of old china which adorned what-nots and peeped from within cabinets of sandal-wood inlaid with pearl, with which the pretty drawing-room was furnished, that they had little time to mourn over a fate which was all too hard.

With Ida the very excitement of anticipated change appeared to dispel the gloom which had fallen over her usually exuberant spirits, until she had almost returned to her old self, as the mahogany and rosewood became hidden beneath the holland coverings.

It was a great undertaking for the two sisters, who had never in their lives travelled further than their fair Devonshire home; but Miss Dilton, who, on the contrary, had been from one end of the Continent to the other, was most kind and useful, directing them what route to take and how to proceed, much in the same way as she would have done had they from the Circus asked her the way to Charing Cross.

She gave them no end of cards with the addresses of different hotels, which she could highly recommend, and considered they could not go far wrong, when fortunately a friend of hers, with his wife and daughter, were going to Versailles, and Myra with Ida only too gladly accepted the invitation they gave them to join their party.

"But man proposes, and God disposes." It was a chilly morning in early October, though the sun still shone brightly on the few remaining leaves, which seemed unwilling to quit the branches on which they had rocked and swayed in the soft summer days. Ida had already descended to the one sitting-room which had not dislodged itself, awaiting her sister, who had lingered upstairs a while, superintending the packing of a large trunk.

The morning letters had arrived, amongst which was one bearing the London postmark, addressed in the stereotyped writing usual to

lawyers' clerks, and which in no small degree excited the curiosity of the former.

"A solicitor's letter for you, Myra," she said, as Mrs. Trevor entered. "Who can it be from?"

"I have no idea," her sister replied, at the same time that she put it through the twistings and turnings before opening it, to which Ida had previously subjected it, and then she nervously tore open the envelope.

It was such an unusual circumstance that they should receive a legal missive that it was with a dread of something unpleasant that Myra unfolded this.

She merely glanced, in the first instance, at the name of the firm which headed the same. It was from Norris and Norris, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and ran thus:—

"MADAM,—

"It is our painful duty to inform you of the death, on the 19th ult., at Sydney, of Mr. Maurice Trevor, whose affairs previous to his departure from England were placed in our hands. I have also to state that he accumulated considerable wealth, amounting to over £20,000, during his stay in the Colony, which, with other funded property of which he was possessed, he has bequeathed solely and absolutely to you. Awaiting your favour, we are, Madam, yours faithfully,

"NORRIS AND NORRIS,

"Solicitors to the deceased."

The letter fell from her grasp, Ida hastening to her assistance as a deathly pallor overspread her countenance; but it was the surprise, the suddenness of the communication, which for the moment paralysed her feelings more than the contents of the letter itself. The only grief she felt that death should come, depriving her now of all power to clear herself, that Fate should be so cruel, that he should go to his grave believing her false, he whose great love could not withstand enriching her, gathering together treasure in those long years of his exile from home and country for the benefit of her who he died thinking to have done him the greatest wrong; and in that moment Myra felt more love for the dead man than she had ever experienced in her young life; and then other thoughts as madly rushed through her brain.

She was rich, she was free—what then? And a guilty flush swept over her features which had so lately been white as marble; then yet another more worthy of herself passed through her mind. It was the recollection of an old faded letter, torn at its folds, the last written by that now lifeless hand.

"Poor Maurice!" was all Ida said, and she replaced the paper in the envelope from which Myra had taken it; and the latter, the first pain past, sat silent and sad, with great tears welling to her large blue eyes.

"Will you still leave England?" Ida asked.

"Not England, dear, just yet," she replied; "but Teddington, yes. I could not remain here to be food for gossip!"

Miss Dilton was told, when she called at the villa a few hours after, that owing to the death of a friend, and their having come into a fortune, that their plans for the present would be altered, as their intention now was to go no further than London; and the little lady, in total ignorance as to how matters really were, was most profuse in her congratulations, little dreaming that each word she uttered went as a knife into the hearts of her hearers.

Mrs. Norris's letter was duly acknowledged, and later on Mrs. Porter, the caretaker, recommended by Mrs. Baxter, put in an appearance at the villa.

The first shock past, Ida came to the conclusion that, after all, it was a happy release Maurice dying when he did. What was the good, she inwardly argued, of husband and wife living, with so many thousands of miles between them, and yet being fettered just as though passing their lives beneath the same roof, whilst Myra went about all that day like one in a dream. True, she had never loved Maurice as he had done her; but she was so young, scarcely know-

ng her own heart. Had she been older, had she understood the extent of the man's strong passion which he in his older years had lavished upon her, trusting to that great love which not even a belief in her falsehood could destroy, she would have unb burdened her mind of that secret—which as a millstone hung around her neck, and thus saved each the misery which was their portion.

But it was all past now, and taking from the place where it had hung so long the black-bordered card mentioned in that letter, penned in the agony of his soul, she placed them together, with the certificate of her marriage, and turned the key of the box that contained them for ever.

A gentle tap at the door caused her to erase from her countenance all trace of the tears which had swept down her cheeks, and fallen on those mementoes of her past life.

It was Mary, the housemaid, to inform her of the woman's arrival; and giving directions she should be sent to her, a few minutes only elapsed before Mrs. Porter entered the room.

"I thought it best, Mrs. Porter," Myra said, "that you should come a day or two beforehand, that you might see exactly how things were before we left."

"Yes, ma'am, so Mary said," Mrs. Porter replied, dropping a curtesy; "and she tells me she is not going to leave, so that I shall have company like, you see."

"Are you timid, then?" Myra asked.

"Lor! no, ma'am," the woman replied, "seein' as how I have been alone for the last twenty year, and it was me that was quite by myself in the Hollies when Miss Dilton went to foreign parts two years come Christmass!"

"I wonder Miss Dilton did not tell us of you in the first instance, instead of recommending Mrs. Baxter. What a strange woman she seems."

Mrs. Porter looked at Myra almost as strangely as Mrs. Baxter had done a few days since.

"Why, didn't she tell you, ma'am, why she couldn't leave her cottage?" she asked.

"No," Myra answered, "but she seemed awfully afraid anyone should enter it."

"Well, ma'am," said Mrs. Porter, in a confidential tone, "she puts it about among the neighbours that she has a sick lodger unable to leave his room, and that she has to stop at home to tend him."

"Why didn't she say so, then?" Myra asked.

"That I can't say, ma'am," Mrs. Porter replied, "but I know folks do say that after dark a young man has been seen to leave the cottage and return stealthily like when everyone was supposed to be abed."

It was then that Myra remembered the cautious opening of the window which took place on their visit, and the head which had suddenly disappeared on her raising her eyes to the lattice; but, making no further comment on the matter, she bade Mrs. Porter follow her, and she would show what rooms were locked, and those she was to occupy during their absence.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SURPRISE.

It was agreed that they should leave Teddington by an early train the day after that on which they had received Mrs. Norris's communication.

Captain Outram called in the morning, who, being unaware of the change in their programme, bade them a sad adieu, holding Myra's hand much longer than Ida thought at all necessary, whilst wishing her every good wish on her journey, and a hasty God-speed home again; but then Ida was only too anxious for the hour of departure to arrive, for had not Charles Dilton volunteered to accompany them to London? It would not interfere with his business, the difference in the time, and he would see them comfortably settled in a quiet hotel before leaving them for good.

So the morning slipped quickly away, and Miss Dilton insisted, when the moment they were to

start came, that she would accompany her brother to say a final good-bye.

The fly which had been ordered was already at the gate, when together they crossed the road which separated the two homes; but they thought it strange, on advancing to the hall-door, which was slightly open, that no sign of the sisters was visible, whilst the girl who answered their summons looked scared and bewildered.

"Are the ladies within?" Miss Dilton asked.

"No, ma'am, they are not come back yet!" Mary returned.

"Not come back!" brother and sister ejaculated, in a breath. "What do you mean? Are they from home?"

"Yes, ma'am," the former replied, trembling all over. "Just as Mrs. Porter and I was getting down this truck," pointing to one standing in the hall, "a boy came tearing up from the village, to say as how they were to go with him at once, and then he said something quiet-like to Mrs. Trevor, and they all three started off there and then."

"And you had no idea who had sent for them?" Miss Dilton asked, turning to Mrs. Porter, who now appeared on the scene.

"I think I heard the boy say Mrs. Baxter," she replied; "but won't you step in here, ma'am?" opening the door of the sitting-room recently occupied by the sisters. "I have no doubt they will be back soon."

But seconds became minutes, minutes hours, and still no sign of their return, Miss Dilton the meanwhile fidgeting from chair to chair, first calling Mary, then Mrs. Porter, to question them in turns, until at last she insisted on her brother going to unravel the mystery.

"You had better take the fly and go to Mrs. Baxter's at once; something I feel sure, must have happened." And Charles, equally anxious as his sister, required no further pressing to act on her suggestion.

The widow's cottage was soon reached, but looked sad and dreary in that October day, so quickly drawing to a close, and the brown bough stems trailing over its dirty white walls, where the westerly blossoms had bloomed and died.

There was no sign of life about the place. The windows were carefully closed, the door alone being left on a jar, as though someone, in the hurry of the moment, had forgotten to latch it.

Pushing it gently, Charles Dilton entered the little room on which it opened, when he became conscious of voices proceeding from the one above; and advancing quietly to the small staircase which led up to it, he could distinctly hear sobs, as if from someone in great grief.

"Don't cry, dears," he heard. It was a man who spoke, but the tones were feeble, either from illness or bodily pain. "I was never any good, and I am not worth the tears you shed. No, no! you should be glad to think I am going. I—am."

The last words were spoken slowly, like as if they gave relief to the sufferer, realising to him a happiness for which he longed. Then, as the woman's tears and sobs were his only response, the mind of the dying man (for such the listener was assured he was) appeared to wander to when, as a boy, he moved in the scenes to which his imagination led him.

"Yes!" he cried, "look at the old thrush; she is away now, and we will soon have the nest. There, look! Isn't it pretty, with its four speckled eggs! Quick! make haste, take it in! Here comes father, and I shall have so much Euclid to learn; don't tell him."

Then all was quiet, save the suppressed grief of the watchers, when in moving to obtain, if possible, a view of that chamber of death, Charles happened to upset a chair.

It evidently had been heard above, for he had but scarce time to move from the staircase when Mrs. Baxter hastily descended.

"Lor'! Mr. Dilton, you here, sir! am I getting so dark too. How you startled me!"

And closing the door behind her, thus shutting out the stairs, she proceeded to light a lamp.

"The days do draw in fast, and no mistake," she said, without making any allusion to the

scene which was being enacted overhead; evidently hoping, as her visitor could see, that his visit would be of short duration.

"You have someone ill here, Mrs. Baxter; who is it?"

The woman nearly dropped the lamp as Charles thus addressed her.

"Well, sir," she answered, "I didn't think as how I was doing any harm when I took him in. But I didn't know it was you, sir—indeed I didn't."

And she burst into tears.

"But he told me a pitiful tale, and that the perils were after him; and wasn't it that he'd met with this accident, I should never have known, that I shouldn't."

And Mrs. Baxter was about to enter into full particulars when a scream from the room above caused her hastily to advance to the same.

She had taken the light with her, unconscious at the moment that Mr. Dilton had followed in her footsteps.

Nor were any who were there assembled around the bed aware of his presence; whilst he, as though transfixed to the spot, watched the scene before him, at the same time that a tumult of feelings passed through his mind.

There, with his eyes already fixed, over which the film of death had gathered, making a last feeble struggle for the breath which was gradually passing from him, lay George Merrick, his hands convulsed with the last great agony, still firmly and tenderly held by Ida, bathing them with her tears; whilst Myra, with her face buried in the coverlet, sobbed in bitter, heartrending grief.

One quiver of the eyelids, one last parting of the lips for the escape of the last sigh, and all was over. The absconding clerk, the forger, had gone to his account. He who had brought such sorrow on others had gone to answer for his sins at a higher tribunal than that which awaited him here.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MYRA'S NARRATIVE.

"COME away, it is all over." It was Charles Dilton who spoke, advancing to where Ida still clung to the dead man's hand.

At the sound of his voice the girl turned, surprise and anguish depicted on every lineament of her countenance, whilst she allowed herself to be led from the room, followed by Myra, who stayed but one moment to close the eyes which had been so dear to her in life, though casting such sorrow over her own youth.

Charles spoke not a word; but leading them to where the fly still awaited them, he assisted them to enter, whilst he gave directions that they should be driven without delay to the villa.

Miss Dilton was anxiously awaiting their arrival; she knew, whatever had occurred, that leaving Teddington at that hour was out of the question, so had taken upon herself to give directions that the luggage should be replaced and preparations made for their remaining there that night.

The little lady was in a fever of excitement; and when her brother, who was the first to enter, made his appearance, she was about to ask a series of questions, but the face which met hers caused them to die on her lips. It was a face which seemed to have aged visibly in the short interval which had transpired since she had parted with him but three short hours before;

and reverencing the sorrow which had left such indelible marks on his countenance she restrained the impatience with which otherwise she would have elicited from him what had occurred.

To press her kindly hand, and look into her eyes, their own suffused with blinding tears, was all the sisters could do; and then feeling the sanctity of a grief, of the extent of which they were in ignorance, the others left them, knowing by instinct that in so doing they pleased them most.

But the next morning a messenger arrived at the Hollies, and in answer to the tiny three-cornered letter thus delivered, Miss Dilton was soon with her young friends.

"You sent for me, dear," she said, when Myra entered the room into which she had been ushered.

Her eyes were swollen with weeping, with rings which told too plainly how her night had been spent, whilst the black dress in which she was habited only tended to exaggerate the extreme pallor of her complexion.

"Yes, Miss Dilton," she answered, "and how kind of you to come so soon; I could not rest, dear, till I had told you all," she said. "Your brother's sad face has haunted me all through the night. And oh! such a night—it was terrible, terrible!"

Here she buried her face in her hands, seemingly to shut out the terrors of that through which she had passed. Then she went on.

"Did he tell you who it was that died in Mrs. Baxter's cottage when he came to seek us yesterday?"

"He told me something, dear, but he was so tired; but I think he said George Merrick."

"Yes, yes, that is right," she replied, in answer to Miss Dilton. "It was George Merrick, and he was—oh! Miss Dilton, don't turn from me; I don't blame me too much till you have heard my story—he was my brother."

"Your brother?" the former ejaculated, "your brother?"

"Yes, yes!" Myra answered, her whole frame shaking with the emotion she vainly endeavoured to restrain; "he was my brother, many years older than we were; a wild, impetuous boy, who even in our babyhood, Ida and mine, we fairly worshipped. Even then I can remember he was always in scrapes; and my father, whilst doting on us, his pet twins, seemed to have no patience with his open-hearted boy—for he was open-hearted then, brave and fearless as a young lion; but too soon he found his very truth was the cause of his being so often in disgrace, and resolved on a different line of conduct; no longer hesitating to tell a lie, which hitherto he would have scorned to utter. To our mother alone he never told a falsehood; his love for her was a something so holy that he looked to her as to his God, whilst she, though ever upbraiding him for his faults, it was through those very faults that they were drawn closer together, as whilst shielding him from my father's anger she thus encouraged him in the very sin she corrected.

Thus matters went on from bad to worse until he was eighteen, and we saw but little of him, he being away articled to a solicitor in London, the bar being the profession to which he was destined.

"He hated it from the first; but as his protests had no effect, there was no other course open for him but to submit. He did so, with the result that to make up for the weary hours he spent day after day in a stifling office, he who was free as the birds of the air, his leisure time he gave up to gambling; the excitement gave impetus to his life, but the wild companions with whom he associated soon helped to eradicate the little good which was still left in him, and he went down, down, until one night he found himself ruined, a bill to which he had forged the name of the lawyer in whose office he was failing due, and he without a penny to meet the same.

"In this dilemma he wrote to my mother, but unfortunately before the same reached her it fell into my father's hands. He was inexorable. 'Let the law take its course,' he said, and it did; he would not lift a finger to save him; and, scarcely nineteen, his only son was condemned to five years' penal servitude.

"My mother never survived the shock, but on her death-bed made us promises—we were but fifteen then—if ever he returned, and we came across him; for her sake to beseech him; when with his name the last upon her lips she passed away.

"To us George was as dead; in our hearts alone could we cherish his name, which was forbidden by my father to be mentioned in the home circle.

"Thus two out of the five weary years went by, and I became a bride. The man I married I never truly loved, but it took me from a love-

less home, and Ida, from whom I would not part, came with me.

"My father did not long survive our departure, and the years went on, in which I became again happy, until my two-year-old baby, on whom I doted with all a mother's love, was taken from me, and then things seemed to go wrong. I grew selfish in my grief, rebelling against the divine will, and then to add to my trouble George returned.

"How he found out where we were I don't know, for we were then in London, but I conclude he had traced us from the Devonshire home. However, he came to me one evening when, all alone, I sat bemoaning over my sorrow.

"Oh! so altered. In place of the frank boyish face I had loved so dearly was the face of a man worn, but defiant, as though he sought revenge for the wrongs he had suffered.

"Don't you know me, Myra?" he said, and then as my husband's footstep fell on the carpet of the room by the open window of which I was seated, he disappeared somewhere in the garden which ran at the back; but he had found me out, and a day or two after I received a letter in which he stated he was starving, and I must help him to live.

"How could I help him to live? I knew it was out of my power, but my mother's dead face seemed to rise before me, and I promised him I would, at the time little knowing in what way it was to be done. However, my husband requiring a managing clerk at that time, I represented George as the brother of an old schoolfellow, and begged him to take him into his office.

"At first he hesitated, seeming thinking it strange that I should ask him such a thing, but as in most cases he eventually gave way, and George soon became installed in that capacity.

"For some months all went on smoothly; he gave the greatest satisfaction, and inspired so much confidence that the former never questioned his antecedents; and I had vainly hoped that all was well, when one day Maurice encountered me with a lengthened countenance. There had been serious defalcations in the accounts. However, he told me he should watch the course of events before speaking.

"I was in an agony of fear. I wrote George to meet me without delay at a spot named, when, denying all knowledge of what I mentioned, he appeared so aggrieved at the charge I suggested that I began to think my husband must be labouring under a mistake. However, I met the former night after night, hoping by so doing, if he had done wrong, to cause him to stay before it was too late.

"But the blow came when I little expected it; my letters, in which I had appointed to meet him, had been intercepted before they reached his hands, and when the appointment was kept Maurice, my husband, was fully aware of our meetings.

"All this he told me, when on the day my brother decamped after embezzeling a large sum of money he came to me, mad with jealousy, so blind in his wrath, that notwithstanding my assertions that I was innocent of the crime he brought against me, he swore that I was false, that it was an old lover whom I introduced to rob and despise him, and then he left me without another word."

"My poor girl," said Miss Ditton, when pausing in her narrative Myra could no longer restrain the emotion which the recollection of all she had suffered caused her to feel.

"And you have never seen your husband since?" the former asked, whilst Ida, who had meanwhile entered the room, advanced to her sister's side, endeavouring to soothe her in her distress.

"No," she answered with an effort subduing her sobs. "From that day we parted for ever, he dying in a foreign land, still believing me the guilty creature that he deemed me. But it was not for that, Miss Ditton, that I asked you to come and see me; it was to implore your and your brother's forgiveness for the part I acted towards him. But George promised me so faithfully that I should not find him deceive me, that with my mother's words still ringing in my ears, and his face, the face I still loved so

dearly, pleading to me for help, I once more yielded, you know with what result. Oh! Miss Ditton, can you forgive me?"

"I can," and a kindly hand was laid upon her shoulder, but it was the voice of Charles Ditton, who told her in tender and gentle tones to let the past be buried in the dead-man's grave, who had done her so great a wrong.

Growing impatient, he had come over to see what had become of his sister, when Ida had led him so quietly to the room where she and Myra were seated, that, until the latter, unable to sustain her strength longer, at last gave way, did his presence become known.

#### CONCLUSION.

The day after George Merrick was consigned to his last resting-place, the sisters, at Miss Ditton's suggestion, carried out their former intention of leaving Teddington for awhile.

"You will be all the better for a change of scene," that little lady said, "and in the fresh springtime of a bright new year will return to us, welcome as the buds and the flowers."

And so they did, and not many weeks had elapsed after their return to the villa, when the little birds began to whisper to each other of the love-tales they had heard while nesting in the branches overhead.

With their grief so fresh in their hearts, Charles Ditton could not bring himself to speak of the love which was weaving into his soul on that day when he parted with them at the London terminus, on their way to the Continent; but now that life seemed to have opened anew for them, he was one of the tales to which the tiny songsters gave ear, when Ida, in her now-born happiness, nestled close, so close, to the side of him whose strong arm was held out to shield her from life's storms.

And Miss Ditton's prophecy, who is as great a match-maker as ever, is now fulfilled, or at least she declares that it was she who foretold a union between Myra and Captain, now Sir Ralph Outram, for the old gentleman is dead, and the latter has left the army, taking his beautiful bride to his southern home.

"You may have the 'Hollies,'" she told her brother, "for now that the villa will be empty it would be much more suitable to me"; so, notwithstanding all protests on the part of Ida or her husband to the contrary, the little lady carried her point.

[THE END.]

#### WOMAN'S GREATEST CHARM

(FROM THE "BRIGHOUSE ECHO")

In perfect health. The healthy woman, full of bounding life and enthusiasm, centres attention on herself, is admired by men, and envied by other women.

She is never melancholy, jealous, irritable, excitable, nervous, hysterical, or subject to fainting fits.

If any woman who reads this has one or more of these complaints she should beware of the beginning of the evil.

Vogeler's Curative Compound is a sure cure for all these symptoms.

It cures Dyspepsia, which in most cases is the direct or indirect cause of the above complaints, from which so many women suffer.

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So she was provided with a kitchen-knife which had outlived its best days, with which she hacked ineffectually away at the rosy peaches, during intervals of hovering over bubbling kettles, until her white eyelids began to droop, and she was borne away from the busy scene.

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#### LOVE AND FRUIT.

—30—

"THERE'S Jeremiah—and the peaches!" snapped Miss Prudence Mattison, her dark eyes glooming sombre thunders in the direction of a lank country boy who was mopping his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief, as he watered his horses at the stone trough, just outside the hedge that surrounded John Thorndyke's farm.

Inside the wagon were rows of peach-baskets, full of great velvety spheres, glowing beneath pink mats of netting.

"Well?"

This lazy little query was languidly dropped by Kate Thorndyke, who had been sitting with her aunt on the front porch for the past hour, as her dark-blue, dreamy eyes reluctantly sank from sunset wonders to this world of actualities.

"Well! It's far from well!" growled Miss Mattison. "Here these peaches have come back from town—"

"Couldn't help it, marm," interpolated the rueful knight of the red handkerchief, as he stumped up the plank-steps, to give an account of himself. "You told me not to sell them peaches under your price, and the market was so full that I couldn't, so, in course I had to bring 'em home agin."

"And didn't you know that as the peaches won't keep till to-morrow, that is, was better to sell at any price than not at all? Oh, Jeremiah, Jeremiah! will no one ever succeed in beating a thumbfull of wit into that red head of yours?" quibbled Miss Prudence, seemingly of the universe at large, as she tilted her sharp nose and angular chin, and searched the blue vaults of heaven, despairingly.

The namesake of the prophet ambled ruefully away, his handkerchief trailing in the dust; and Miss Mattison and her pretty niece were left alone to consider the situation.

Not that John Thorndyke, the handsome young widower who owned Thorndyke's Farm and used it as a summer residence, would have cared two straws whether those peaches were wasted or not; but his aunt and sister, who had been left at the head of affairs when he had been called away on business, right in the midst of the fruit harvest, had determined to conduct affairs so wisely as to come off with flying colours, and to be a perpetual demonstration of the thrif and capability of womankind to scoff mankind as embodied in John.

"If John found out about this, how he would tease us!" mused Kate.

"We must do something," declared Miss Prudence, desperately. "I'd go back to town with the peaches myself, but it is really too late," she sighed, as she noted that the sunset was fading into twilight, and the intermittent lamps of the fireflies were already flashing along the waxy-dark hedge.

"I have it!" exclaimed Kate, suddenly, clapping her pink palms as a brilliant idea solved her vexed question. "We'll tin them, and sell them to the stores."

"That we will," assented Miss Prudence, nodding so vigorously that her short black curls stood on end, like Queen Dido's in the old nursery game. "We'll do finely, if every one helps you and I, and Sue, Mary and Jeremiah."

"Me, too!" piped a small, sweet, unexpected voice; and Baby Kit, a golden-haired morsel of five years, rolled from the little pink-cot where she had been taking her afternoon nap, and came forward to demand her rightful share in the domestic excitement.

So she was provided with a kitchen-knife which had outlived its best days, with which she hacked ineffectually away at the rosy peaches, during intervals of hovering over bubbling kettles, until her white eyelids began to droop, and she was borne away from the busy scene.

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and cream at the thirsting of the "Daughters of Temperance," over in the round-topped school-house, no one uttered a word of complaint, while they worked steadily away through the long, scented summer night.

The glow of dawn was just creeping over the pearly sky, and the sleepy young birds were beginning to chirp, when the last tin was sealed and marshalled with the long ranks of its comrades on the white-pine floor.

"Has it paid?" yawned Kate, brushing away a clinging velvet coil of peach-paring from her checked apron with stiff fingers.

Sue, Mary and Jeremiah remained circumstantially non-committal.

"Of course it has paid!" replied Miss Mattison, every short black curl defiantly triumphant, as she regarded the rows of peach-tins much as if they formed an important link in the chain of woman's progress.

It was a perfect day for a nutting excursion. The purple mist slept on the distant swells of prairie as softly as a bridal veil; the maples, sumachs and oaks were fairly iridescent, and the ivory hickory-nuts were tumbling from their husks with every breeze that blew, much to the delight of the newsboys and bootblacks of Kent Brainard's mission school.

Kent Brainard was the principal owner of the great foundry that puffed its clouds of soot and sparks upwards at all hours of the day and night.

He also owned a large farm, and was the projector of a new railroad; so even if he had been other than the handsome bachelor he was the girls of Brainardsville would have deemed him a golden prize in the matrimonial pool.

But he had fought his way up from the ranks, and now seemed to see in every ragged boy a counterpart of his old self, as he ran errands, sold newspapers, and did everything possible to aid his frail, pretty little mother in her struggle for bare bread and a leaking roof.

So he founded a lodging-house for poor boys, established a mission school, and devoted every moment that he could spare from business to the elevation of the little ragamuffins, who adored him with all their warm hearts.

"So odd of him!" said Rosa Boffin, a pretty girl with fair hair, long eyelashes, which she made the most of, and pretty gestures and tricks of expression, which she practised daily before a mirror.

But, nevertheless, she developed an unsuspected vein of plioty, and took a class in the mission school, where she beamed upon the thirteen boys that fell to her share as sweetly and sunnily as was possible for any one to do whose heart was seething all the time with detestation for themselves and their pranks.

The children had finished gorging themselves upon a substantial lunch, and Kent Brainard and all the teachers of the mission school were seated at an especial table as Miss Boffin's invited guests.

It was decked with the daintiest napery, bright with silver and coloured glassware, and loaded with the most tempting of lunches, yet Kent Brainard's glance kept roving towards his adventurous youngsters.

"Won't you have another peach, Mr. Brainard?" said Rosa, sweetly.

"That foolhardy little Tom Matthews will certainly fall," said Kent, absently, as he watched a little carrot-headed fellow climbing like a monkey to the very topmost bough of an elm tree.

"I wish he would fall! I wish every ragamuffin in the world would break his good-for-nothing little neck, and then perhaps Kent Brainard would have eyes and ears for other people!" Rosa breathed into the little pink ear of Mamie St. John, another pretty mission teacher.

Rosa's plioty was evidently only a thin veneer-ing.

"Oh, I suppose he's training up Tom Matthews' cross-eyed little sister, Biddy, for his wife. He appears to be just infatuated with the girl!" whispered Mamie, in return, making a little grimace of pretty disdain.

"Another peach did you say, Miss Rosa?" inquired Kent, after he had watched little Tom descend in safety. "Yes, thank you, I will have one."

But a fat young man, who was devoted to Mamie St. John, and likewise to the good things of this world, had helped himself to the last peach in the cut-glass dish, and as Rosa tilted the tin to renew the supply, something fell with the peaches—something that proclaimed itself brightly as gold when an arrow of sunlight caught it.

It was a locket, with the inscription "Aunt Kate to little Kit" traced on one side, as Kent discovered, after immersing it in a goblet of water, and wiping it with a napkin which blazed with the Boffin "B," done in red stitching-silk.

Kent opened it curiously and studied the face within attentively.

Frank, sweet eyes of darkest blue met his own; a saucy, tender mouth laughed up at him; and he could almost fancy that the dimple nestling in the sweet pea cheek deepened beneath his gaze, so overflowing with radiant life was the girlish face.

"How romantic!" cooed Mamie St. John, peeping over his shoulder. "Now, of course, you will trace the peaches from Johnson's, where Rosa bought them, to the place where they were tinned, and never rest till you have found the fair original, when the thing will end in cream-coloured satin and the Wedding March!"

"Thank you for the suggestion!" said Kent, his dark eyes sparkling mischievously.

"Nonsense!" broke in Rosa, a trifle tartly; for she did not relish this trifling. "Mr. Brainard will never care half as much for any woman as he does for little Tom Matthews, Billy Jenkins and the rest of the ragged crew."

"The said that every man meets with his Waterloo in the form of some fair woman. Even Michael Angelo had his Vittoria Colonna, and why should not Kent Brainard, that ragged old bachelor with plebeian tastes," waving his shapely hand toward the "ragged crew" in question, "have his Kate!" laughed Kent.

Many a true word is spoken in jest, however, and Rosa would have felt the misty foundations of her rapidly-rising air-castle beginning to melt away, could she have seen Kent carefully lay away the little locket in the pink satin folds of a glove-case that she had given him for Christmas, as he soliloquized:

"Why shouldn't I at least trace out 'little Kit' and give her back her locket?"

Kent Brainard is one of the few men that I would be willing to trust your happiness to, my pet. And it was all those peaches. Blessings on that stupid Jeremiah!" beamed Miss Mattison, kissing the half-hidden flushed cheek belonging to her niece, who had just buried her head in her aunt's ample lap, after telling the story that is as old as the hills, yet always as fresh and sweet as the rosebuds.

By which it will be seen that Mamie St. John was a true prophet.

"It wasn't all those peaches," said Kate, raising her pretty, crumpled dark head with a pretty little laugh. "Part of it was Kit; for if she hadn't dropped her locket into the kettle of peaches, like the dear little meddlesome darling that she is, I wouldn't be the happy girl that I am to-day."

"Give credit where credit is due," laughed John Thorndyke, coming into the room. "If the much-maligned little god, Cupid, who occasionally does do a good thing, hadn't saved Brainard from all the girls who must have been pulling caps for him, and our 'queen-rose' from the lovers who were buzzing about her like so many bees, and brought them together, peaches would have availed very little."

"It was a clear case of Cupid and peaches!" admitted Miss Mattison, with her expressive little curl all a-flutter as she beamed felicitations upon the universe in general through her steel-bowed spectacles.

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## REFORMED.

—:—

My Cousin Georgina was a fine girl, physically and otherwise. She had the prettiest eyes I ever saw. She was tall and slender; and she was swift-footed as a deer. But, alas! she had a tongue.

For most of the time, indeed, that little tongue could make sweet music—could drop words like honey. But there were times when I could almost have wished it omitted entirely.

The truth is, Georgina was fired with a desire to reform the world, particularly that small part of it wherein she daily moved. She not only used to give us the most unpalatable advice—which, strange to say, we did not always heed—but actually told us of our faults—which, stranger still, I, for one, did not enjoy. She was dreadfully energetic—industriously inclined, too; running up and down stairs, waiting on pa and ma, sewing, sweeping, teaching, or correcting—generally correcting—her younger brothers and sisters.

I fancy I see her now—her eyebrows in a pucker, her little hand tightly clenched, as she burst one day, like a small whirlwind, into the room where my uncle and I were calmly smoking and talking politics.

"Oh pa!" she cried, "oh, pa! did you really trade Polly Popcorn away for that ugly, horrid old horse? Oh, pa, how could you do it?" And to all my uncle's explanations she had but one answer: "How could you do it? It's too bad—too bad!"

These scenes often occurred. Now, I am a good-natured man—indeed, I think I may say, a very good-natured man. You may imagine how painful, therefore, all this was to me; and, though I looked over the top of Georgina's head, and pretended not to hear, it was hard to remain placid and amiable. It was specially so when her remarks were aimed at me, as was often the case. The positiveness and freedom with which she commented on my manners, morals, and general conduct in life—well, somehow, as I remarked before, I didn't much enjoy it.

"Really," said my uncle one day, "really, Georgina disturbs me very much. She's always asking questions, and—and giving her ideas on various subjects—often when she knows nothing about them: my nerves are quite shattered with it all."

I advised him, in reply, to go out into the fresh air; and, soon after he had gone, Georgina came into the room.

"Where is pa?" she asked, looking around. "Smoking, smoking still! You're always smoking, it seems to me."

"I—always—I—Georgina?" I began, apologetically.

"Yes, sir—always. And you have such an air of superiority. When I find fault—and, gracious knows, I do it, rarely enough—with your smoking all day, and—and doing nothing, you won't talk back to me; and you look so provokingly—it makes me angry. Why, I believe you are laughing at me now, sir."

"Of course, my dearest cousin," said I; "that's human nature; and I don't pretend to be better than the rest—"

"Oh, I'd like to wring your neck!" she interrupted; and, really, she looked capable of it.

"Is it possible," I said, making for the open window, "that such a murderous impulse—"

"Do not be so absurd," she interrupted, severely. "You have some little sense, I think—why not use it? Be a man. Ah, if I were only a man."

"What would you do, ma petite cousine?"

"Work," she said, energetically, with a fine tragedie-air. "I'd be ambitious; I'd never rest content with being a poor gentleman, a mere 'nobody' all my days."

"But I do work, Georgina; head-work."

"Nonsense; that's nothing," with fine womanly contempt for what the dear things know nothing about. "I can do that while I work with my hands. And, besides, how much thought does it require to manage an

estate like yours—only a thousand acres, I believe!" sarcastically. "If it were a principality, now, you might talk. Ah, yes, I know how you do—you and pa, and all the rest of 'em. You ride here, there, and everywhere, looking at horses, and talking of some election, or other folly; and you call that attending to business. You read newspapers and such stuff; you lie on the sofa, and smoke, and smoke, and smoke. Yes, sir, that's the work you men do; so what's to become of us poor women?"

"Get married," said L.

"Indeed I and who am I to marry, sir, pray?" she replied, sharply.

"Me," said L.

"You?" remarked Georgina, tossing her head. "And with your nose!"

This shaft struck me in a tender spot. My nose? What was there about this feature to make its owner blush?

It is not very big, nor yet absurdly little, and as far as I can see for myself it does not turn aggressively either up or down; but it is a slightly demobilised nose. It entrenches perceptibly upon my upper lip; indecision lurks in every curve; there is a suggestion of I-can't-make-up-my-mind-about-it, which I claim is nature's libel on my character. I don't deny that I am sensitive on the subject.

"Believe me, Georgina," I said, "I feel my unorthodoxies. I was only thinking that the unfortunate family traits, on which you often enlarge, had better be confined as far as possible to—them!—to the family."

"You are very thoughtful—very," said she, stiffly; "more so than I gave you credit for. I thank you very much, sir, for your self-denying offer; but—I am not quite a goose, though I don't deny that I am a woman."

"You cannot deny it," I said.

"I don't want to deny it," said she.

"Don't you?" said L. "Well, you know you couldn't, if you did want to."

"I can," said Georgina, and she began to cry, as if in pure contradiction.

I smoked. Presently I said,—

"But what would you advise me to do—how begin the reformation you desire? Tell me, cousin."

"Ah, if I thought you were in earnest," she replied, "if I thought you would really listen to what I say," and she took her seat a little nearer. "Now let me tell what I would do in your place. I'd sell Stony Lonesome. 'Twill be sad, I know—the dear old place—but it would be best. Then I'd go away. To the West Indies, perhaps, or—or Patagonia—or wherever people make large fortunes. I'd stay till I could come back a rich man—'somebody,' you know. Just think of it."

"But I'm pretty comfortable as I am."

"Comfortable! Oh, yes, sir, you seem to be; that's the dreadful part of it. Comfortable, indeed! I wonder you're not ashamed to confess it. Ignobly contented, you'd better say."

"But, Georgina, how could you get along—how could you do without me?" said L.

She tossed her head in silence.

"But, dearest cousin," I went on, making one more appeal to her hard heart. "One instant, consider—suppose something were to happen to me before the fortune was made—suppose I died!"

"You look like dying," sarcastically: "a great fat creature," and she turned her back on me without more ado.

I smoked. What could I say after that?

That evening, in the peaceful calm of my sitting-room at Stony Lonesome, I was thinking of Georgina. This was no unusual thing for me to do. But on this occasion I was thinking that my cousin Georgina had missed her vocation. "She ought to have been manager of an institution for reformed criminals," I said. "She is always preaching at a fellow, and hammering away at what she thinks his faults. I don't want to act the part of a reformed criminal. But, on the whole, however, I want a wife, and no other young lady will suit me as well as Georgina." Then I reflected that "all is fair in love and war," and decided on my stratagem.

So a few evenings after, when I paid my next

visit to Ramshackle Hall, and Georgina, as usual, tendered me a cigar, after bringing one to her father, I shook my head in refusal.

"I shall never," I said, "smoke again." As I spoke I handed her the little crimson embroidered cigar-case which she had given me a year before, on my birthday. "I'll not use it in future," I said; "give it to some unredimable slave to that wretched soul-enumerating habit, or put it to a more innocent service."

She took it without a word, while my uncle, feeling perhaps out of place in such virtuous company, rose with a whistle, and left us alone.

"Yes, Georgina," I said; "how can I express the gratitude I feel when I think that I owe my present state of mind to you?"

She looked at me rather suspiciously. I returned her gaze with a gravity becoming the occasion. Her countenance cleared.

"Dearest George, you are very good to say so," she answered, and sat down quite close to me, her eyes full of tears.

I never felt so mean before in my life.

"It was you and this blessed book," I said; "both together were too much for me." Wherewith I showed her the book in question, which I had brought with me. It was a formidable volume, that I had found, covered thick with dust in the library, and on the title-page: "The whole Duty, State, and End of Mankind: Considered from a Gentle, Moral, and Religious Point of View. By the Rev. Ignatius Dallard."

Georgina looked at it, and shuddered visibly.

"This precious book is worth its weight in gold, Georgina," I said. "It is just what you would like. Shall I read you a few chapters?"

"Ye-s-s; indeed, I should enjoy it above all things," said she, seating herself to listen with a resigned air.

Now it was no uncommon thing for me to read aloud to Georgina; and though I often got a lecture for wasting my time, if I selected what she called light and trifling reading, I had an idea that she enjoyed it, nevertheless.

"The title is good," said she, whereas I began and read the first nineteen pages. "Excellent!" said Georgina, when I paused at last. "I have enjoyed it exceedingly." Yet, if you will believe it, she had been actually nodding.

"Georgina," I said, "it is my opinion that every word of this book deserves to be printed in letters of gold."

"Ab—yes. I am go glad that you appreciate it," she replied, suppressing a yawn, and trying to assume an air of mild enjoyment.

I read another chapter, and it was a fearfully dull one. I almost went to sleep myself; and I noticed, as I read, that Georgina moved her feet about, and started convulsively every now and then. She seemed troubled with that singular nervous complaint children call "the fidgets."

"Beautiful—and so good," she gasped, when I paused again; but sprang up in a hurry, before I could begin another chapter. "I must go now, dearest cousin," she said; "I hear mamma calling me. Yes, it is indeed a most delightful book."

"I didn't hear anybody call," I said. "Here—Helen—just a few more pages. Must you go? One moment—just one word. What you said about my going away—I have considered it, and I have resolved to adopt the plan you so kindly suggested. I shall go as soon as my arrangements can be made."

"Gone away!" cried Georgina, with startled emphasis, forgetting all about having heard her mother call. Then she said, recollecting herself:

"Certainly, you are quite right. I am delighted—delighted." She added this with a sickly smile, and then fled rather abruptly.

A day or two after I paid another call at my uncle's. Georgina received me alone.

"My cousin," said L. "the die is cast; it is all settled, and I have sold Stony Lonesome."

I regret to say that this was not exactly the fact; but—well, I will not stop to apologize.

"What, already!" she almost screamed. "How could you? Well, of course, it was all right; but you were in a great hurry."

(Continued on page 520.)

## HER FATHER'S SECRETARY.

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### CHAPTER XIV.

THE sound of the door opening and closing caught the ear of the sick man, who had waited so long and had listened so intently for it.

"Gwen," he called, eagerly; "Gwen, darling!"

There was the sound of quick footsteps, the soft rustle of a woman's dress, and some one was bending over him.

"Gwen, my life, my love!" he murmured, eagerly, stretching out his hands.

But the little hand that was laid upon his forehead was not the warm, jewelled hand of Gwen, but the plain, trembling, cold hand of Gladys. He realized that even before she said,—

"It is I—Gladys."

"Is she with you?" he asked, eagerly. "Ah! surely she has come. It is cruel to keep me in suspense."

"No," said Gladys, sadly, "she is not with me."

The cry that broke from his lips was hard for her to bear, it was so full of bitter desolation and disappointment.

"Did you see her?" he asked. "Tell me all quickly. I am sure they are keeping my darling from me. Oh! Gladys, is it not so?"

The question gave Gladys a happy thought, and she acted upon it at once.

"Listen, Rupert," she whispered, "Gwen cannot come to you. Yes, she is kept from you. You must hurry and recover to go to her."

"Ah, Heaven! how cruel they are!" he moaned. "But it is as you say, Gladys; I must hasten to get strong enough to go to her. Then bolts and bars shall not separate us. I shall have the greatest incentive this world can offer to leave this sick-bed. But tell me; you must have some message for me from my darling."

"There are only these words, repeated over and over again, that you must make haste to get well."

"Nothing more than that!" he asked with great disappointment. "Ah! you hesitate, little Gladys, there is something else to tell—I am sure."

"I only want to say this," said the girl, in a low voice; "you must try to realize that one young girl never sends messages of love by another. When you see her I think she will tell you that."

A light like a glory came over his despairing face.

"I never thought of that!" he cried. "Oh, Gladys," seizing her hand and covering it with kisses, "what a comforting angel you are, to be sure!"

From that moment he seemed to have but one ardent desire, and that was to get strong enough to get to The Mount once more, and clasp his darling in his arms.

The happiest moments he knew, lying there on that bed of pain, was clasping Gladys' hands and unfolding to her his plans for the future; how he would work night and day for wealth and fame for Gwen's sake, and how happy he would try to make her.

It was pitiful to note how his every thought centred around her. She was the Alpha and Omega of his every hope, his every ambition.

The doctor was greatly pleased at the progress his patient was making, and at the end of a fortnight he broke the astonishing and joyful news to Mrs. Dane that he had great hopes of saving Rupert from being either blind or crippled.

"It is the assiduous and careful nursing that has brought about this result," he declared, looking at Gladys with a smile.

Mrs. Dane's joy and gratitude knew no bounds, and as for Gladys, no words could portray with what thankfulness she heard the joyful intelligence. Surely Heaven had answered her fervent prayers.

During all that fortnight no message, not even an expression of sympathy, reached the occupants of the humble cottage from the proud young heiress of The Mount.

"How easily she forgot Rupert, and accepted another lover," thought Gladys indignantly, when he heard Melville's approaching marriage to Gwendolen discussed on all sides.

Twice she had seen St. John riding by, as she was walking up the village street, and both times Miss Melville had turned coolly away without recognising her, much to Gladys' keen mortification and distress. It was painfully evident that the heiress had no possible use for her—that she meant to cut her acquaintance entirely.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten day when the doctor announced that on the morrow Rupert might venture beyond the confines of the little cottage; for on that day another event happened that changed the current of three lives.

Early on that morning a letter had reached the cottage, written by a lawyer, announcing briefly the death of Rupert's uncle; and in the will which he had left, Rupert was named as sole heir to his entire fortune, which amounted to hundreds of thousands. A goodly cheque accompanied the letter.

With streaming eyes, the widow threw herself into Rupert's arms.

"Heaven has been more than merciful to us, dear," she said. "How thankful we should be! And another thing: we must do well by poor little Gladys Barton. Remember, you owe your eyesight—ay, your very life—to her constant watchfulness and care."

"Gladys shall not be neglected, mother," he promised. "We will talk about that later. I—I cannot help but give all my thoughts now to anticipating how pleased Gwen will be. I can hardly realise that I shall be permitted to leave the cottage to-morrow, if it is fine, and that I shall see my darling Gwen."

He wondered why his mother uttered no word, but commenced to sob on his breast.

"Even the greatest pleasures often have their drawbacks," he went on. "The doctor forced from me the promise that if I did venture out, I must still continue to use this crutch and these blue glasses for a week to come. Of course, such a sight will terrify Gwen; but she loves me so well she will not think very long of how hideous they make me appear. And, oh! mother, how surprised her father will be when he hears of the immense fortune I have come into possession of! And when I ask him for Gwen, mother, I do not think he will look upon my suit with disfavour. Ah, how great is the power of gold, mother! I am so thankful to have it, for Gwen's sake. Not that it will make the slightest difference to her, bless her! for she loved me when I was only her father's poor secretary."

He little knew why his mother sobbed so on his breast, or dreamed that she was petitioning Heaven that he might not die from the terrible blow that awaited him.

Long and earnestly Mrs. Dane talked it over with Gladys as to whether she ought to tell Rupert the whole truth before he sought Gwen, or to let him go unprepared to meet the blow in store for him.

They both concurred at last in the opinion that it would be wisest and best for him to learn of Gwen's duplicity from her own lips.

A carriage was called early the next morning, and Mrs. Dane and Gladys watched him depart with eyes blinded by tears.

Ah, how happy he looked! but how soon all that would be changed!

As the cab rolled quickly through the village streets, Rupert gave himself up to thinking over all the episodes of the past, and particularly of that tragic moment in which he had risked his own life to save Gwen's.

How he had received the blow which came so near causing him to shuffle off this mortal coil he could not determine. That it had been dealt him by the treacherous hand of his rival, St. John, he never once dreamed, but quite believed it had been caused by the hoof of the plunging horse.

How his heart leaped when the tall turrets and gables of The Mount loomed up in sight!

Mr. Melville greeted the young man cordially, expressing himself as highly pleased at seeing his

young secretary about so soon, and hoping he would soon be able to take his place at his desk.

There was just the slightest suspicion of a smile about Rupert's lips. He wondered what the haughty lawyer would say if he were to reply,—

"I shall never take my place at your desk again, sir. I am a millionaire now."

Why, at that moment his good fortune seemed to him more like a mad vision of his own imagination than a solemn, sober reality.

Mrs. Melville was glad to see Rupert. She could afford to show her friendship for him now that Gwen's betrothal to St. John conclusively proved to her there was really no love affair between her daughter and the young secretary.

"I am rejoiced to see you so nearly recovered," she said, holding out her jewelled hand to him; "and doubly rejoiced to learn that the chances are that you will come out of the sad calamity neither blind nor crippled. We had all grieved so much over that. No one will be more pleased than myself when you are able to throw away both spectacles and crutch. I am very sure Gwen will be pleased to see you, Rupert; she is in the conservatory, or, rather, was there a moment ago. I will call her."

"If you will permit me, I should prefer going to her there," he returned, eagerly.

"As you like it," returned Mrs. Melville, indifferently.

With some difficulty he made his way to the conservatory. Yes, Gwen was there. She did not hear him enter—she was not aware of his presence, although he stood so near her that he could have put out his hand and touched the folds of her dress.

He gazed at her with his whole soul in his eyes, and the slanting golden sunshine that streamed in from the arched eastern window never shone upon a more beautiful picture. It would have charmed a beauty-loving artist, and have made his fortune. If he could have reproduced on canvas that lovely, slender form in snowy white, the dark, haughtily poised curly head, the dark, pliant, dimpled face, and the perfect arms—from which the sleeves fell away at the elbow—upraised to the drooping lemon bough above her head,

He could have knelt down and worshipped her where she stood. And in that moment a great flood of thankfulness filled his heart that wealth had come to him. Ah! how he would lavish it upon her; she should have every wish of her heart gratified, if money could purchase it for her; but the sweetest thought of all to him was that she loved him for himself alone.

Yes, those beautiful, snow-white arms and that perfect alabaster throat should shine with gems; and, oh! how proud he would be of his peerless Gwen! And he wondered if all men who were in love loved with the same intensity that he loved dark-eyed Gwen.

As if compelled by the mesmerism of a near presence, Gwen turned her head slowly and beheld him standing there.

"Gwen!" he cried, rapturously, extending his arms to her; "oh, Gwen, my darling!"

## CHAPTER XV.

INSTEAD of the flush of love that he had expected to see light up her eyes, he beheld something very like fear.

"Gwen," he repeated, "am I so changed, dear, with these terrible glasses and crutch that you do not know me? I am Rupert—your lover."

He moved nearer to her, and would have clasped her in his arms; but she drew hastily back from him.

"I am sorry you came here," she said; and her voice sounded cold, harsh, and unnatural even to her own ears. "You should never have done it."

His arms fell to his sides, and he dropped down as suddenly and heavily on the nearest seat as if he had been shot.

Was this girl standing here so cold and proud, so indifferent before him, the wilful, impetuous

little darling whom he had clasped in his arms a hundred times while she whispered that she loved him, and that nothing in this wide world should ever part them?

"Gwen," he cried, "am I mad, or is this some horrible dream? Surely you have not changed toward me in so short a time! Tell me you care for me still!"

"If I were to say those words they would not be true," she answered, shivering as she looked at him.

At that instant he beheld a flashing diamond on her finger, and a deadly pain, like the cut of a knife, smote him to the heart. He caught her hand, and despite her efforts to draw it from his grasp, gazed at it steadily.

"That is not the ring I gave you, Gwen!" he said in a voice husky with emotion. "Where is mine? You never wore it on your finger—you had it attached round your neck by a silken cord, you said."

"I intended to send it back to you," she said in the same cold, pitiless voice; "you shall have it directly. I will go and get it for you."

He stepped quickly forward, barring her exit. It almost seemed to him that the great, strong heart in his bosom slowly broke as the words fell from her lips.

"Be plain with me—I do not understand," he faltered. "For the love of Heaven, be frank—tell me what has changed you so, Gwen, for you are changed! Dim as my eyes are, I saw that when I first looked upon your face, I realised it even before I heard you speak. You owe it to me to tell me the truth. Have you ceased to love me, Gwen?"

"You mistake me!" she said, haughtily. "What you are pleased to call love, I have looked upon as only a romantic fancy—a pleasant flirtation between you and me. It ended with my betrothal to Mr. St. John, which took place a fortnight ago. I am sure nothing further remains to be said, Mr. Dane. You ought to have realised, even better than I did when I opened my eyes to the actual facts of the case, that the great difference in our stations in life preclude all such mad thoughts as love or marriage between us."

He rose slowly and faced her. Her words had gone home—they had struck to the very core of his heart. He gazed at her steadily as she stood there in the warm glow of the sunlight, her beautiful face so proud and cold; and as he had looked, the love which had filled his heart changed slowly. His love died a violent death; her cruel, scornful words had killed it.

"Only a flirtation on your part—a romantic fancy!" he repeated. "While I live I shall never forget those words. I have said that I love you—that I worship you. I take back my words. Had I known you as I know you now, fair of face, but cold and proud, without pity, without heart, my love would never have been offered to you."

"I am very glad to hear it," she replied, frigidly; and her coolness angered him even more.

One gleam of pity or of tenderness would have brought him to her feet again; but her proud indifference enraged him more than her scorn.

"Is this all you have to say to me, Gwen," he said, hoarsely, "all—after what we have been to each other?"

"Yes. I should advise you to marry Gladys Barton—she loves you, the silly little thing!"

"The time will come when you will repent the words you have uttered to me to-day, and wish that they had never been said," he muttered.

"I do not think so," she replied, imperiously. "Be kind enough to allow me to pass, Mr. Dane."

With a heart as heavy as stone, he stepped aside.

"Good-bye!" she said, proudly, as she turned away, leaving him there alone.

She did not see that he went to the spot where she had stood, and, kneeling there, kissed the cold marble square her feet had touched.

"It is all over," he said to himself.

The darkness and chill of death and desolation had fallen over him, and the light of heaven seemed to shine for him no more.

He had been so utterly happy in his love, and now—

"I cannot face life again!" he cried; "I cannot bear it. I wish to Heaven that I had died!"

He thought of the great fortune that had just come to him, and he laughed aloud in his bitterness.

It had come to him—too late. What did it avail him now? It had come—too late.

How long he remained there on the spot, where his love had been crushed within him, he never knew.

He stretched out his arms with a woful cry. Ah, beautiful, proud face! Ah, scornful, sweet lips! The memory of them would never leave him while life lasted.

With unsteady steps, and swaying to and fro on his crutch, he made his way down to the carriage in waiting, muttering to himself, as the ponderous arched gates closed after him with a dull, resounding thud, that his proud, beautiful love should torture him no more. She had taken his heart in her hands and crushed it ruthlessly.

The sun was setting when he reached home, and it seemed to him that the clouds piled up in the western sky were the colour of blood.

He saw his mother and Gladys standing in the doorway, and he knew they were watching for him. Oddly enough, as he saw Gladys standing there in the waning light, Gwen's words came back to him,—

"Go and marry Gladys Barton. She loves you."

Then his senses became suddenly confused; the red clouds, the sky, and the two forms in the doorway seemed to be rocking to and fro in one dark mass, then his carriage came to a standstill.

How he got out of it and reached the porch he never knew.

"Mother," he said, weakly, "I have come back to you again. I am sorry I did not die before I left our cottage."

The next moment he was lying senseless with his head on his mother's breast.

Then there came another weary fortnight of watching beside the couch on which Rupert Dane lay, struggling between life and death, and again Gladys was his faithful nurse. She scarcely ate or slept for days at a time while his life was despaired of, and her only solace were the oft-repeated words of Rupert's mother:

"You could not be more of a comfort to me, dear, if you were my own daughter."

It was a lovely sunshiny morning when Rupert awoke again to a realization of what was passing around him—and awoke, too, to the consciousness that some one was kneeling beside his couch, weeping bitter tears.

Who was it? He opened his heavy eyes slowly, and saw the fair head of Gladys, and he wondered vaguely why she should weep. But even as he asked himself the question, the past, with all its sorrows, passed like a great kaleidoscope before him and the bare branches of the trees outside, as they tapped against the window-pane, seemed to repeat Gwen's scornful words:

"Go back and marry Gladys Barton. She loves you."

He thought of it as he lay there quietly and listened for one brief instant; then suddenly and pityingly he reached out his hand and laid it gently on the fair, bowed, curly head.

"Gladys," he said, faintly.

She raised her head with a startled cry, and shrank back from him; but he had caught the little hand and held it.

"Why do you weep, Gladys?" he murmured.

"You must tell me."

"It was because I—I—thought I should have to go away without saying good-bye to you, Mr. Dane," she faltered; and an uncomfortable sensation swept through his heart at the very thought.

She hung her pretty head; he saw her lips quiver, and her sweet blue eyes fill with great tears.

"You must tell me where you are going, Gladys," he urged, "and why you are leaving us. Have you not been happy here, little girl?"

"Happy! Oh, Mr. Dane, it has been Heaven to me here!" she sobbed. "But now you are so

well that your mother can do without me, and I must not stay any longer."

"But where did you think of going, Gladys?" he persisted.

She burst into tears, and laid her face in her hands.

"I do not know yet, Mr. Dane; but surely He who watches over the homeless birds will take care of me."

"You have neither home nor friends," he said, slowly, "save this roof-tree and those that are under it. Why will you not remain with us, Gladys?"

"Oh, I cannot—I cannot!" she sobbed. "I must go away."

Again as the sobbing cry fell on his ears, he thought of the words:

"Gladys Barton loves you. Go and marry her."

Did poor little Gladys love him? Ah! was there anything in this world so terrible as to love one who did not return that love? Was that Gladys' grief? She was homeless, friendless, penniless. Would she not gladly have remained were this not the case?

Suddenly a strange idea came to him—an idea so startling that at first it almost took his breath away. What was life to him? Love and happiness were evermore to be a dead letter to him. If Gladys cared for him, why not make her happy if it lay in his power?

He gently drew the little hands away from the lovely, despairing white face, and gazed into it searching.

"You say you have been happy here!" he said, gently.

"Yes," she sobbed; "oh, so happy, Mr. Dane!"

"And it grieves you to leave here?"

"Yes," she sobbed again.

"And that means that it grieves you to leave mother and me!" he persisted.

Again the fair head was bowed in assent, after a moment of hesitation.

"Then look up into my face while I ask you this, little Gladys: Will you consent to stay here at my wife?"

## CHAPTER XVI.

GLADYS BARTON turned as white as death; she looked into Rupert's face with startled eyes.

"I repeat, Gladys," he said, slowly, "will you remain here as my wife? You need not go out into the cold, cruel world alone, friendless, penniless, helpless! I will protect you, cherish you; you shall have everything your heart craves that money can buy. What is your answer, my dear girl? Perhaps," he added, after a moment's pause, "you want time to think it over."

The hand he held was cold as ice. She would have drawn it from his clasp, but he held it closer, looking earnestly into the girl's lovely, pale face.

"I can give you your answer now, Mr. Dane," she faltered. "You—you ask me to marry you on the impulse of the moment, and I say to you no, I will not. The time will come when you will thank me from the depths of your heart for that answer."

He did not love Gladys Barton, still he was man enough to feel considerably piqued at the girl's point-blank refusal of him when he had every reason to believe that in secret she loved him with her whole soul.

"Will you give me your reason, Gladys?" he urged. "I could not be satisfied with that answer without it."

And the clasp of his white hand tightened upon her own.

"I may just as well be candid with you as not," she answered, with a pitiful attempt at a smile. "You ask me to marry you without a particle of affection for me, and without that wedded life must be sorrowful indeed. No; I would rather die than marry another girl's lover—and you love Gwen Melville!"

He started back as though the words had stung him.

"Gladys!" he cried, "listen to me; and believe me; I loved Gwendolen Melville once, and

with all the deep, passionate love of my nature; but now I swear to you every vestige of that love is dead; it was killed at one blow. I believed her little less than an angel. I found I had been greatly deceived in her. I turned away from her a changed man, with my idol shattered, my love-dream broken. I shall never look upon her face again—never in this world. I am going far away from this spot where I have known the height of happiness and the depth of despair, and my mother accompanies me. I ask you again, Gladys, will you go with me—as my wife?"

"But you do not love me," murmured Gladys, with a little sob.

"I believe you love me, Gladys," he said, boldly; "and if this be really the case, you will not allow your pride to raise a barrier between us. Take time to think the matter over, and give me my answer a week from to-day. If it be 'yes,' I promise to make you a true and devoted husband. My mother has already informed you regarding the change in my prospects. You were my true and noble little friend in adversity, and now I would show you my steady appreciation in prosperity."

There was the sound of footsteps in the hallway without, and Rupert had just time to whisper: "Remember, I shall hope for your answer one week from to-day, Gladys," and Mrs. Dane entered the room; and Gladys, with flushed cheeks and eyes brighter than they had been for many a long day, soon after made her escape.

She never remembered how she gained her own room, but once there she flung herself down on her knees, and wept as she had never wept in all her life before; but it was for joy, not sorrow.

It almost seemed to her that it must be a dream—a wild fancy of her disordered brain—that Rupert Dane had actually asked her to be his wife!

As for Rupert Dane himself, a dreary sigh broke from his lips as the door closed after the girl.

"Yes, it is quite true: poor little Gladys loves me," he muttered, burying his handsome face despairingly in his hands. "How strange that I never noticed it before! I can see it now in her every look, her every action. Poor little girl! Ah! well, if by devoting the balance of my wretched life to her I can make her happy, why should I not do it?"

True, there would never be passionate love between them; but he would be very careful that she should not realize the lack of it.

The following week was one of great activity in the Dane cottage. Rupert was so far recovered that the doctor had declared the crutch and blue glasses were no longer necessary, and once again he looked like the handsome young secretary of yore.

He was busy settling his affairs, but for all that he could not help but notice how Gladys avoided him on every possible occasion; and in spite of the fact that he had no love for her, he began to look forward with much curiosity to the day when she was to bring him his answer.

He little knew how exciting that week had been to poor Gladys Barton. No one ever knew how she paced the floor of her little room for long hours at a time, crying out to Heaven to guide her in this all-important dilemma of her young life.

Should she marry him or refuse him? That was the question she asked herself over and over again. Could she school her heart to the bitter thought that if she refused him she would see him never again? No wonder, loving him as she did, the girl's heart was torn with conflicting emotions; and she realized that life would not be worth living if separated from him.

At last the eventful morning dawned. Gladys purposely absented herself from the breakfast-table; but Rupert found her alone in the cosy little living-room when he entered it an hour later.

She was standing at the window, gazing dreamily out into the sunshine, and so intent were her thoughts that she did not hear his step,



"GLADYS," HE SAID, GENTLY, "I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU ALL THE MORNING!"

nor was she aware of his presence until he laid his hand lightly on her shoulder.

"Gladys," he said, gently, "I have been looking for you all the morning."

She uttered a little cry, drawing shyly back, her lovely fair face suffused with a scarlet blush like the flaming heart of a great red rose.

"Don't you know, Gladys, that the week of grace is up?" he said, looking down into her blue eyes. "Have you an answer for me, little girl?"

For one moment she hesitated, then turned and placed her little white hands in his.

"I am yours if—if you want me, Rupert," she said, simply.

He stopped and touched the girl's lips lightly, murmuring that he hoped she would never regret those words; but in that moment he could not help thinking how commonplace this betrothal was in comparison with that other; but he quickly disengaged the thought as being disloyal to the girl who had just promised to be his bride.

Mrs. Dane was delighted over the affair when her son called her into the room and announced his engagement to Gladys.

She took the girl in her arms, declaring, as she kissed her warmly, that no news in the wide world could have pleased her better.

It brought tears to Rupert's eyes to note how very fond his mother was of Gladys.

When he placed the betrothal-ring upon Gladys's finger, it almost took her breath away.

"Is it a diamond, Rupert?" she cried, aghast, looking with dilated blue eyes that seemed to catch and imprison all the sunshine about her.

"Yes," he answered. "Are you pleased with it?"

"It is too fine—too grand for me, Rupert," she said in a low voice. "I do not think that it was ever intended that I should wear anything like this," and tears began to fill her eyes.

"Do not say that again, Gladys—you pain me," he said, gravely. "I consider the ring a

very common one—for the bride of a millionaire."

She looked up into his face with wistful eyes.

"The bride of a millionaire!" she murmured. "Oh, Rupert, am I worthy of that? I—I am so plain."

"You are all that is good, true, and pure," he answered. "What more could any man ask for in a wife?"

Rupert had insisted upon an early wedding, and to this his mother had joined her earnest entreaties, so what could Gladys do but consent.

It was decided at length that the wedding should take place at a handsome country-seat which had been among the possessions willed to Rupert Dane by his eccentric uncle.

It had been the home of Mrs. Dane in her girlhood; she had gone forth a bride from beneath that roof, and it was in compliance with her earnest wish that it was decided the ceremony should take place at Cleveden.

Gladys was to remain under her protection as her *protégée* until that all-important event transpired.

It was not long until the news of the vast inheritance which Rupert had fallen heir to, together with his engagement to Gladys Barton, became noised about.

Mrs. Melville and Gwen heard it, with great astonishment, from the lips of a visitor who had called.

"Worth a million of money!" gasped Mrs. Melville, when she found herself alone with her daughter. "I—I always had a liking for your father's young secretary, Gwen," she declared, "and always said he would make his mark in the world. A million of money! Why, do you know, dear, that is nearly twice as much as St. John is supposed to be worth! I—I must confess I am a little sorry that you threw young Dane over him. But, after all, he could not have been much in love with you, my dear," she added, consolingly, "for the same report conveys the intelligence to us that he is to marry Gladys Barton."

Gwendolen Melville had listened with a face white as death. At the mention of her old lover's intention of marrying another, all the old smouldering love in her heart seemed to burst anew into flame. But the worst trial of all to bear was the intelligence that Rupert Dane had come out of the terrible accident neither blind nor crippled, but more handsome, more gallant than ever.

"His intended marriage to Gladys Barton is announced through *pique*!" declared Gwen, vehemently; adding, with flashing eyes, "Why, I could draw him to my side again, mamma, if I were to speak one kind word to him, give him one smile, one gracious look. I will not believe that he is to marry Gladys Barton. I tell you it will never take place, mamma," she cried, vehemently—"never!"

(To be continued.)

The oldest and most curious herbarium in the world is the Egyptian Museum at Cairo. It consists of crowns, garlands, wreaths, and bouquets of flowers, all taken from the ancient tombs of Egypt, most of the examples being in excellent condition. Nearly all the flowers have been identified. They cannot be less than 3,000 years old.

In California inland seas are being turned into farm lands. Thousands of acres in the San Joaquin Valley that were only watered wastes full of tules and peat bogs have been made into the best land in the State, and more are being improved. All the work has been done in the last year. Through the land a canal three miles long, one hundred feet wide and ten feet deep, was dug. Then levels twenty feet wide at the base and as wide as a good wagon road at the top, twelve feet above the water line, were built. After dredges took all the mud from the enclosures, pumps drained them dry, leaving excellent farming land.



"GO AND LOOK AGAIN," MRS. DE BURGH COMMANDED; "IT MIGHT BE A BURGLAR."

H. F. HERICK.

## JOCELYN DE BURGH.

—30—

### CHAPTER XIX.

HUGO GETS A CLUE.

MARTHA had been right; Richard de Burgh and his daughter had left Miss Barry's house none too soon. The folly of his last night's search had been plain to Hugo's shrewd brain in the clear light of the early morning. Martha was not surprised, when the door-bell rang sharply, to find Hugo de Burgh again on her doorstep, accompanied by two quiet-looking men in plain, rough clothes.

"My mistress has not returned!" she said gruffly, barring their way. "As for you, sir, I don't know who you may be," with calm untruth, "but this is the second time you have forced your way into this house, and I'll have you know you can't do it." With a swiftness he had not imagined dwelt in her shrivelled old hand, she beckoned to a policeman who stood on the opposite corner.

But Hugo turned to him with his languid manner, before the old woman could pour out her complaint.

"This is my card," he said quietly, "and these men are two attendants from the Hornsey Asylum. My stepbrother has escaped from there, and we have reason to think he is harboured in this house. Miss Barry, who knows me, is unfortunately away; but as my brother is a homicidal maniac, perhaps you will convince this good woman to allow the Asylum men to do their duty."

The policeman grinned respectfully.

"Certainly, sir," he returned. "Just you let these gentlemen in," to the apparently furious Martha. "You can't keep them out if they're looking for a lunatic, whether your mistress is here or not."

"There's no one here," Martha returned, grimly; "and so I told that man when he came

here last," pointing a knotty finger at Hugo. "Lunatic, indeed! What would I be doing with lunatics?" She turned furiously to the policeman. "Mind, if these are thieves you're letting into my mistress's house, you'll have to pay for it!" and she stalked angrily along in front of the invaders.

If she had been wise she would have followed them instead; for when the useless search was over she saw suddenly that Hugo was not with his men. With a horrible foreboding of evil the old servant rushed down to Miss Barry's cold dining-room, and at the writing-table sat her enemy, coolly going over the pages of the blotting-book with a small pocket-mirror.

"Lunatic!" she ejaculated. "Fine lunatics you're after in my mistress's private papers!" She snatched the neat blotter away from him, and towered over him like a Gorgon. "Get out of this house with your lies about lunatics!" she screamed, but at the look in Hugo de Burgh's eyes the words died on her lips.

"I am quite ready, my good woman! You can tell Miss Barry I obtained what I wanted." As he spoke he rose with his usual languid grace. She heard him give an order to his men in the hall, so low that she could not catch the words, and she sank down on the nearest chair, still clutching the rifled blotter. What could he have got out of it? She turned the blurred pages in vain, never dreaming that what was an unintelligible mark to her, on the very first page, had been plain as print to her enemy, with the aid of his tiny mirror. Miss Barry, weeks ago, when the blotting-paper in the book was fresh, had blotted there the label for Jocelyn's box when she had turned her out into the world.

"Miss Jane Brown. The Warden School for Girls, Chester."

It had been the first thing Hugo had seen, and it had gone far to console him for the escape of his stepbrother. The girl was found; he felt certain of that, though he had never known that she went by the name of Jane Brown.

"It must be the girl," he thought, as he copied

the address on a card. "She is the least part of it, but one never really knows, and she will be easier to manage than the Barry woman."

Miss Jane Brown, assiduously correcting French exercises the next afternoon, was summoned to the presence of Mrs. Warden, and went gaily and unsuspectingly, like a lamb to the slaughter. On the threshold she stopped short, for a man who looked young, and was extremely good-looking, stood with his back to the drawing-room fire.

"This gentleman has been sent to see you, by Miss Barry," Mrs. Warden said, calmly, "and though she does not care for your having visitors, as a rule, I suppose we must make this an exception."

Mr. de Burgh's best manner had made the stern lady principal as wax.

Miss Brown, paralysed, stared at the unwelcome visitor. Miss Barry had sent him; he would know she was an impostor; he would tell!

But she was brave, forlorn little walf though she was. With one quick breath she rallied and came quietly forward to the man who might, with one word, turn her from her home and her living.

"You wished to see me!" she said, very low. "Perhaps you have a message?"

Mr. de Burgh was for once at a loss. This was a total stranger who stood before him, not in the vaguest way did she resemble the tall, slight girl he had seen with Miss Barry.

"No; no message!" he returned, hastily. "That is, I was passing through Chester and Miss Barry merely asked me to let her know how you prospered, though I need not ask."

But the real Jane Brown had seen the amazement in his face. If it had not been for Mrs. Warden's placid presence she would have thrown herself on the mercy of her visitor; as it was, she kept her courage miraculously.

"I am quite well, thank you. It was kind of Miss Barry to inquire," she said, bravely, but she did not sit down.

Mr. de Burgh felt suddenly, under her fearless eyes, that he was sailing under false colour and

had better go. He had hardly finished his beautifully-done exit when Mrs. Warden turned to her governess.

" You were not very cordial, my dear," she observed, rather reproachfully; even at forty-seven a handsome, well-mannered man does not cease to interest the average woman.

Miss Brown's eyes filled with sudden tears; she had grown fond of Mrs. Warden.

" I couldn't feel very cordial; he was a perfect stranger to me," she said, miserably. " May I go now?"

Mrs. Warden nodded. She had an uneasy conscience about the late visitor, and decided she would not write to Miss Barry of his arrival as she had intended.

Poor little Jane Brown, who had been getting nearer every day to her ambition of becoming a full-fledged governess in a grand house, was writing a letter herself. When it was gone, by the means of the friendly day-pupil, she wondered whether she had done well to send it with a curious prescience of evil.

The day-pupil had almost run to the post-box, being anxious to get her errand over. She gave a little vexed exclamation as she had to stand waiting a moment to slip in Miss Brown's letter. A gentleman, in immaculate London clothes, was in her way, apparently posting letters.

" I am so sorry to keep you waiting;" he took off his hat with a languid grace, and the day-pupil (who was pretty) giggled with rapture, for here was a real adventure, just like a novel.

" There seems to be something the matter with the box, but I think I have conquered it."

" Either!" the schoolgirl said, vivaciously. " I shall have to go on to the next one, and I haven't time."

" I think it's all right now. If you will allow me!" With a well-done glance of admiration, and a quick movement that was too graceful to be snatching, the stranger possessed himself of the letter in the girl's hand and apparently slipped it into the pillar-box. She did not see that he substituted an envelope already torn that happened to be in his pocket.

" Thank you!" she said, with expectant coquetry, but her romance was nipped in the bud. With a grave bow the man turned away and walked in the other direction.

The day-pupil was uncomfortable, though she assured herself it was right. She did not, therefore, mention the incident to Miss Brown, who waited anxiously for an answer to her letter. But days passed, and her substitute made no sign, till at last her fears abated.

It never dawned on her that her warning had never reached Castle de Burgh, nor that her visitor of the afternoon had stood by a street lamp with a light heart, and ruthlessly read his ill-gotten letter.

" I thought there was some connection, I don't know why!" Hugh de Burgh mused, as his keen glance fell on the small, neat writing of the envelope. " The girl looked guilty, somehow. I felt certain she knew the girl I wanted and would write to her. I am glad I thought of waiting; but what luck I should just catch the messenger!"

He was jubilant as he held the letter up to the light; but a strange look came over his face as the address flashed on him.

" Castle de Burgh!" he repeated, mechanically, and stood like a man stunned.

" Jane Brown" had been all this time in his own house.

" The companion!" he thought, furiously. " Bah! how did she get there?"

He was not even certain that Jane Brown was the name Richard's daughter went by, and yet he knew it was. But his mother was right; things were black indeed!

Twenty-four hours after Jocelyn was hastily summoned to the cripple's bedside, where she lay more wax-like than ever, but neither more contented or more kind. Suspense was killing her by inches; to know that Richard was free (since she had always known he was), and able to tell his story to all the world, was a living hell to Alicia de Burgh. Had she done so much only to be ruined in the end?

She would not see either Gilbert or Moyra; they were ungrateful fools, not worthy of their name. Instead, she turned to her companion, who was a stranger, and kept her thoughts away from her dreadful past, her dangerous future. Turned, had she known it, to the only soul in Castle de Burgh who knew her secret.

" Where have you been?" she cried, querulously, as Jocelyn entered. " Get a book and read to me."

The girl shivered under the fiery gaze of the black eyes bent on her. There lay the woman who had ruined her father, powerless in body, but not in mind; Alicia de Burgh's quick brain was to be dreaded still.

" What's the matter with you?" she said, suddenly. " You look as if you had something on your mind this morning. Pray collect yourself, and get the book!"

Jocelyn lifted her head sharply at the hard, cruel voice, and went silently into the sitting-room to get the book, a horridly thick volume in which the invalid's strange mind seemed to revel.

A horror of the cripple came over her, and she hastily pulled out her handkerchief and soaked it in a flask of cologne which stood on a table by the book. The pungent, clean smell steadied her nerves; she returned with steady lips and eyes to the bedside, and read aloud unfalteringly.

Mrs. de Burgh sighed with relief. She had taken a curious, exacting liking for her companion. She looked at her with unwilling admiration. Most girls would have been in tears if spoken to once, as she spoke to Miss Brown twenty times in the day. It was far easier to reduce Moyra to pulp, for instance.

She broke in on Jocelyn's steady reading with a speech which nearly made her drop the book.

" Why couldn't I have had a granddaughter like you?" she ejaculated, " instead of a cry-baby like Moyra."

" What?" Jocelyn cried. " A granddaughter like me?"

" Yes," gloomily. " I don't see where you could get it; but there must be good blood in you somewhere. You're not easily frightened. But I suppose," with a quick return to her old contempt, " you probably don't know who your grandmother was!"

" She was a good woman!" Miss Brown answered, slowly, her eyes meeting the cripple's terrible gaze without flinching. " And don't you think you are unjust to Miss de Burgh? She seems to me all you could ask, and more."

Mrs. de Burgh laughed, and if her earnestness was evil, her laughter was worse.

" She was—a good woman," she mocked. " I suppose you mean, I am not?"

For a moment the girl quailed, then she spoke bravely.

" No, I don't think you are," she said, " though you are kinder to me than you pretend to be."

" Well done!" said the invalid, coolly. " I said you had some courage."

" Courage is not everything. Some people are only brave and strong to do wicked things easily." Was it truly her own voice she heard, saying such mad things to her worst enemy?

" Those are the people who prosper;" the cripple cried, angrily. " Your women with scuples go to the workhouse. If you had what you apparently consider my *crimes*" (sarcastically, little knowing how frail the ground was she trod so rashly) " on your head, I suppose you would fly to that last refuge of the weak—repentance!"

The girl looked at her for an instant.

" I don't know. I never thought it was much use to repent," she answered slowly. " Unless repentance means reparation, it seems to me a cheap way of making peace with heaven."

" Reparation!" scornfully, " that means to throw good bread out of the window and starve. You talk nonsense, girl!"

" I meant if it were stolen bread it was better to give it back than have judgement from eating it," stoutly. " And everyone has to make their peace with heaven some day, no matter how long they put it off."

The cripple's eyes flashed in her parchment-coloured face.

" How dare you speak so to me!" she almost shrieked. " Do you mean I'm dying? Speak girl, don't sit like a stuck pig."

" Not particularly." But her voice was as pitiless as Alicia's own. " I suppose we must all die some day." Some instinct taught her that to deal with Mrs. de Burgh one must thrust hard and quick.

" Die! What is dying?" Alicia had recovered herself. " Just an end of everything, with no more of you. But I suppose you don't think so. I forgot your father was a person, Miss Brown."

For one instant the young woman's face was more dangerous than the old one's.

" Please don't speak of my father. I won't bear it," she said with an authority that quelled even Alicia de Burgh. " Shall I go on with the book?"

" No." For once her employer spoke quietly. " No, I would rather talk to you. You're brave, in your white-faced way. I wonder if I could trust you?"

" No, I don't think you could, if it clashed with my own interests." She did not know why she said it, but her coolness only pleased her master.

" I said so! You will be living well when Moyra would be in the workhouse. You could trust her to cut her own head off, and I hate a fool. Tell me, does she still think about that red-headed Meredith?" with sudden viciousness.

" I don't know, and if I did I would not say so," Miss Brown said amably.

" Give me my handkerchief. It doesn't seem to me that it matters who she marries. I don't think she and Huntley will ever patch it up. But if you were she, would you look at that flamingo of a man when the other was by?"

" I should not," with incautious truth. " Lord Huntley—" she broke off, scarcely knowing what she had been about to say, for Alicia's eyes were fixed on her in scornful amusement.

" Lord Huntley is better looking! You needn't look so ashamed of yourself; I had an eye for good looks in a man myself, once!"

Jocelyn flushed at the tone.

" Why are you so hard on me?" she said, quietly.

" Because it amuses me!" fiercely. " Can't you see I spend my days in torture, and do you grudge me a moment's forgetfulness?"

Her companion did not answer. If she could have had her way Alicia de Burgh's forgetfulness would have been short indeed; yet, against her will she pitied her.

" You don't like my amusements, or me?" the cripple continued, querulously. " Do you?"

" No," very slowly. " I do not. Bah, you might be able to make me like you still, if you really liked me!"

Her heart was beating sharply under the coming of a thought that she had never before dared to entertain. Was it possible that Mrs. de Burgh's altered bearing to her meant that she had at last gained some influence over the fiery soul in its shrivelled body?

But the response checked her hopes.

" Bah!" said Mrs. de Burgh, smartly. " I never like anyone, really. Only as far as it suits me. You take my advice and do the same; it's the only way for a woman."

" You mean it's the only way for a wicked woman," Miss Brown returned, calmly; but the cripple had closed her eyes and made no reply.

Miss Brown opened her book and took up her reading where she had left it. But as she read a terror came over her, that made her glance from time to time at the motionless hangings; at the invalid in her bed. Mrs. de Burgh's eyes were still shut; why, then, was her companion certain that she was *watched*, that they were not alone in the great room where the afternoon light was beginning to grow dim?

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE TRAP IS SET.

Mrs. de Burgh opened her eyes suddenly. " Stop reading!" she snapped, " I thought I heard some one in the sitting-room," staring eagerly at the door.

"No." It had taken all Jocelyn's courage to walk to the open door and look round the room, where the scent of many flowers came so heavily from the conservatory door. "No, there is no one there!"

It was curious that both had had the same thought, and it deepened the girl's uneasiness.

"Perhaps Matthews—" she began.

"Matthews doesn't go into that room unless she's rung for," drily; it was not worth while to say that every servant in the house held the room in horror and would not have entered it after dark. "I must have been mistaken. Ring for lights, and go and get your tea."

Jocelyn was glad when Matthews had lit up both rooms, and brought Mrs. de Burgh's tea, to hurry away to her own quarters. The great house was very dim and silent as she went through the long passages, there was no sign of life anywhere, and the girl longed for some human companionship, like a terrified child.

She huddled down by her own fire, wishing she dared go and look for Moyra.

"I wish I knew what father was doing!" she thought, drearily. "I know he has some plan, and if only I knew it I would feel more comfortable. Mrs. de Burgh will never confess, I know that. And I don't think a lunatic would be able to do anything about a new trial, no matter how many new witnesses he had."

She leaned her aching head against a chair behind her, and shut her eyes. Her room felt safer than Mrs. de Burgh's gorgeous sitting-room, now she knew the awful story Martha had kept back all these years; and presently she fell asleep. When she woke her lamp was lit, her dinner on the table, and the maid making up her fire.

"I didn't know you were here, miss," the girl said, "or I would not have waked you. But the room is cold, so perhaps it's better."

"Is Miss Moyra at dinner?"

Jocelyn blushed in the light of the lamp, and then was suddenly conscious that her dinner smelt very nice, and that she had had no tea.

"Miss Moyra and Mr. Gilbert are dining with Lord Huntley, miss."

"Dining with Huntley!" Some of the savour of her excellent meal seemed mysteriously gone. She sat for a minute, when the maid was gone, and thought. What would she have given to-night for a little mirth, a little happiness! Yet when the man who loved her had a dinner-party, she must sit alone.

"Nonsense!" she said to herself, brakly, "I'm silly to-night. How could Lord Huntley ask Mrs. de Burgh's companion to dinner, even if he were dying to! But I wish Castle de Burgh were a little more cheerful. Somehow I smell ghosts in it to-night!" trying to laugh.

But it was not like having a lover at all, to have a secret between you, and an apparently immeasurable distance of position. Mrs. de Burgh's companion was fiercely conscious that she longed to tell Lord Huntley of Holycross, that she came of as good blood, of as unstained a name, as his own. But that day seemed very far off, perhaps would never dawn.

She went wearily to Mrs. de Burgh as soon as her dinner was finished, and her hatred of the old woman was hot at her heart as she took up the long book where every one was secretly so wicked.

The cripple's mood had changed again; she was propped up in her bed with white satin pillows, and looked better than Jocelyn had ever seen her. She was unreasonably elated too, and strummed an unceasing tune on the coverlet with her withered fingers.

"You can go to bed Matthews," she announced, "I shall not need you again."

Jocelyn looked up in surprise, as the woman thankfully obeyed, and not quickly enough to catch the curious gleam in the crippe's eyes as she gave the order. It was absurd, but Jocelyn would have liked to run after Matthews and beg the woman to sit in the corridor and wait for her. It was uncanny to be alone, in so lonely and deserted a house, with a woman like Mrs. de Burgh.

"Rubbish!" the girl reflected practically, since it was of no use to glance in silent despair

after the vanishing Matthews, "Mrs. de Burgh can't move, so how can she hurt me? But somehow I wish I did not know every one had gone out but the servants, and they are miles off!"

She read for a quarter of an hour or so, at first with a thickly-beating heart, expecting she knew not what. But as her pulses calmed, the room began to look less lonely, the cripple in the bed less diabolical in her satins and lace, that were so strange a setting to her bearded face. She was beginning a new chapter when a faint sound caught her ears; a low rustling, as if some one crept across the floor of the room adjoining.

Mrs. de Burgh held up a bony finger.

"Hush!" she breathed. "What's that noise?"

Her face was livid; afterwards Jocelyn knew it was not with fear. She looked at the open door with eyes that fairly snapped in her head. "I hear something moving!" she whispered.

Miss Brown had dropped her book and started to her feet. For one moment she felt an errant coward.

"Shall I ring for someone?" she faltered.

"Ring! No!" authoritatively. "It can't be anything—Go and look."

The faint rustling ceased; then something fell on the floor with a dull thud that made the girl's racked nerves tighten. Hugo was away, Gilbert out; what if her father knew it, and had come to the castle, as he had done once before, to confront his relentless enemy?

Every trace of terror left Jocelyn's heart. She nodded coolly, reassuringly to the invalid, with as easy a courage as any de Burgh of them all, good or bad; with her head high and her hands steady, she walked calmly into the lighted sitting-room and stood for a moment, waiting to see if her father were indeed coming to her.

The room was quite empty. There was not a sound anywhere.

"Oh! for some little signal that was known only to father and daughter!"

She turned, half-laughing, on the threshold.

"I advanced, 'shoulder to shoulder!' " she cried, her clear voice ringing through the lofty rooms, "but there is no enemy to disperse."

"Hush, girl! I tell you I heard some one!" Alicia cried, obstinately. "Listen!"

Far, far off came a long-drawn wail, and Jocelyn thought she knew it for the cry of the great grey dog at the farm.

"Only a dog, somewhere!" Surely, her father and Moore must be near; if only Mrs. de Burgh would let her go out to see!

"Not that! Listen!"

But there was no need. A horrible, stealthy footstep was moving somewhere, very slow, very careful. The silk hangings of the room rustled, but the girl could not see them move. Was it Richard de Burgh? Oh! if he would only come quickly, surely he and she might force Alicia to confess. She stood breathless, looking from side to side. The noise did not seem to be in the bedroom, in spite of the rustling hangings.

"Go and look again," Mrs. de Burgh commanded. "It might be a burglar. Do you want me to be murdered in my bed?"

Mechanically Jocelyn went back to the sitting-room. Surely the unseen visitant could not be her father; all her blood receded at the thought that those creeping footsteps were his. Yet who else could be moving like a thief in the night in Castle de Burgh! As before, the instant she entered the sitting-room a deathly quiet reigned there. But as she stood she saw the heavy curtain over the door into the corridor move. It swayed distinctly, yet she knew there could be no draught.

Jocelyn flew to the doorway.

"Father!" she said, in an anxious whisper that could not reach the ears of the invalid, "Father!"

She drew back the curtain, flung the door wide; there was no one behind it. Far down the long corridor she saw a moving shadow on the wall, as of a man passing quickly by out of the fading shadow, leaving the cripple alone.

Quickly as she followed, the man in front was quicker; but when she came to the turn of the

corridor she saw a door in front of her shut gently. With the one thought that she must catch up with her father, and tell him that it was no enemy, but only his own daughter who pursued him, Jocelyn tore open the heavy door. For a moment she stood, taken aback, for it did not disclose a room, but a winding stone staircase. From far up it came a gleam of light, and quick, echoing steps. Whoever was retreating before her had left a lantern on the stairs, and was now steadily mounting them, light in hand.

"Wait, it's I!" she called recklessly. But there was no answer, yet for a moment the footsteps paused.

"Who are you? Why don't you answer?" she cried, as she hurried up the steep stair, stumbling on its winding uneven steps, feeling soft touches on her hot cheeks from the waving cobwebs that hung low and swayed in the wind of her quick passing.

At the head of the stairs she came to a full stop. From this there seemed to extend on every side a passage, but the light was gone. Only a glimmer of moonlight through a narrow window high overhead let her see those dark openings on four sides of the corkcrown stair. Down which of them had her father gone?

A cold air that chilled her very bones seemed suddenly round her; she tried to speak, but only an inarticulate whisper echoed uncannily from the stone walls.

For an instant she stood irresolute, almost ready to turn and run down the old stairway again, back to what now seemed the safety of Alicia's company. But a gleam of light far down the passage at her left hand showed suddenly, and a quick anger filled her. Her father, or Moore, it must be! Why could they not wait for her? Jocelyn picked up her skirts, and followed recklessly after the dull gleam of the swaying lantern.

How many corners and devious curves she threaded she could not tell, but she knew she must be in the upper story of the old unused wing of the castle. She was gaining on the light and its bearer, when she stumbled on the first step of another stair. Far up it, she could see the light flashing intermittently as if some one were using it to signal from a window.

Panting, she rounded the last curve of the stair; breathless flew into an arched doorway whence the last gleam had come. But the light died instantly before she had well entered; a heavy door swung noiselessly behind her. Jocelyn turned sharply, stamping her foot.

"Who is here, why don't you speak?" In a tiny shaft of moonlight through a dusty window she could see a faint shadow behind her.

At her words a dark lantern clicked sharply. In the dazzling light she was, for a moment, blinded; and then behind the lantern she saw the man who had fled from her.

It was Hugo de Burgh!

(To be continued.)

FOOT BRIDGES in Morocco that are used for heavy traffic have been the subject of much concern to the engineers. Elm planks on oak string pieces were the materials employed, but these wore out so rapidly that a return to the old style of building was proposed. This consisted of cables made from the fibre of the aloe. These cables are plaited and twisted from fibre and are nearly two inches thick, and eight and a half inches wide. They are saturated with tar and firmly nailed to oak planking. The ends are fastened by iron straps. These cables make most admirable foot paths. They are sufficiently elastic to be pleasant under the feet, and experience has demonstrated that they are far more durable than any material heretofore applied for this purpose.

CHRONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Miasy and Bloating Cured with Tonics "Doctors" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemists, &c., post free from Dr. Hoare, "Blencower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, 6d. 6 stamps.

## REFORMED.

—TOP—

(Continued from page 513.)

"There is a tide in the affairs of men," quoted L. "Would you have me neglect that tide, which may lead on to fortune?"

"Look well before you leap," said she sagely. "I own I did not think you would be in such a hurry to leave us all."

"My dearest cousin," I exclaimed, out of all patience, "was it not you yourself who urged me to take this step? And perhaps?" I added, demurely, "it may, after all, prove to your advantage as well as mine; for Mr. Sourkraut Clabberdebooh, the elegant and aristocratic Dutchman—ahem!—I mean to say German gentleman, to whom I have sold Stony Lonesome, may lead to the solving of that question which you propounded the other day—about providing yourself with a husband, you know. Think, if you catch him, what connections—thirteen counts in the family, I believe, and one Royal Transparency not far off—just think of it!"

"Thank you, sir," said Georgina, biting her lip; "your kind consideration for me is delightful. A thousand thanks; but as for any horrid jabbering Dutchman—no, indeed! If I can't find a gentleman, sir, of sufficient energy and sense to—marry I'll be an old maid for ever before I'll—"

I must say I was hurt at her tone, but we were here interrupted by the entrance of my uncle and aunt; whereat I began reciting my plans for the future—where I was going, how I expected to make a fortune, if not devoured by wild animals, or blown away in a tornado, or lost on the prairies, which, I remarked, were likely to catch fire at any time; how I was ready to turn my hand to anything; Indeed, was resolved to learn the trade of a blacksmith or carpenter (I saw Georgina wince at this), and dwelling on the risk of never seeing them again.

My uncle looked bewildered, my aunt cried a little and kissed me, and the young one protested vehemently against my going away, and Georgina expressed her approbation with a vehemence really greater than was necessary.

Two days after this I went to make my adieu at Ramshackle Hall. I found Georgina alone.

"Georgina," I said, with some decent agitation of manner. "I go to-morrow morning. Alas! the time has come to say good-bye."

She put her hand in mine, but said nothing.

"Dearest cousin," I said, "if it were not for the pleasant prospect of change and travel before me I would be distressed to part from you."

Still she said not a word.

"Yet, wherever I go, whatever I do," continued I, "memory will ever keep alive my gratitude to you. If I am successful I will say to myself, 'Ah, was it not her wish, in the first place, that I should go away?'

"I didn't," cried Georgina, violently jerking her hand away from mine. "I never said I wanted you to go away."

"What?" said I, perhaps looking the surprise I might reasonably have felt. "What?"

"I never said so," she repeated. "I said if I were in your place I'd go."

Here she began to whimper.

"Well, well," I said, "it's the same thing, after all. Yes, I'll never forget that to you I owe the awakening from the sloth of my old life—my—my reformation, in fact."

"Oh—h—h!" sobbed Georgina, vehemently.

"Good gracious!" said I, "why these tears? Are they for joy at the blessed change in my sentiments! Believe me, I appreciate those pearly drops, Georgina."

"Oh—h—h," said she, incoherently. "I don't want you to be reformed. Indeed, I'd rather you wouldn't. Oh, don't—don't be reformed any more. Not in that way. Oh, me! oh, me!"

"Great Heavens!" and I struck an attitude of astonishment. "Can I believe my ears!"

But Georgina was now crying in earnest; and,

as I am the most absurdly soft-hearted fellow in the world, I sat down and took her on my knee, in a friendly way.

"Georgina," I said, "what is the matter? It's not becoming to you to cry. Tell me, do you want me to go away?"

"No," said Georgina, wiping her eyes.

"And you don't want me to be reformed?"

"No, no," decided; "I want you to be like you were before. Was all my horrid temper—my finding—finding—fault."

"Ahem!" said I; "and am I to understand that you have reached the conclusion that I was right in my habits, views, and conduct, generally; and that you are wrong—at least sometimes?"

"Ye—e—e," said Georgina.

"And that, instead of my being reformed by you, I, on the contrary, ought to have been making the effort towards your reformation!"

"Y—e—e," said Georgina again.

"It is a singular revulsion," said L. "Give me a little time to realise the change."

After a little silent thought, I continued,—

"Georgina," I said, "I will accept this duty. I give up my desire to travel, my hope of making a fortune, all my brilliant prospects—all for the sake of your elevation and improvement. To effect this object, it is necessary, however, that we should see a good deal of each other—indeed, that we should live in the same house—you understand. In short, Georgina, I think we will have to be married."

"Yes," said she, in so low a tone that I had to draw her head close to mine to hear at all. "But you've no house—for us to live in now," she added, pensively, after awhile.

"Bless us, no! I had forgotten that. How unlucky that I should have acted so hastily—and under a misapprehension too."

Here Georgina looked rather foolish.

"But perhaps Myneher Clabberdebooh may give up the property, after all; and if so, Georgina, will you accept the sacrifice I propose making? Will you go there to gain the full benefit of my society and instruction—oh!"

Her reply was,—

"Well, I won't say exactly what," but it was pretty favourable.

"And are you sure you won't repeat of the undertaking!" murmured Georgina, presently. "I've such a temper, you know; I'm always finding fault."

"Trying to boss people, my dear," I said, calmly. "Well, there's no telling the influence of a good example. Who knows what time and patient effort may achieve!"

About what we did and said during the next hour or two I find my memory is somewhat weak. I may have had my arm around Georgina's waist; I think I kissed her—indeed, I am almost sure that I kissed her several times—and that I rather enjoyed it. Hang it! why should I be ashamed to confess that I did enjoy it, and more than anything in my whole life before? And I've my suspicions that Georgina did, too; and that she once or twice at least—curious, wasn't it—I-kissed back.

Later on I remarked,—

"Georgina, my dear, I think you may give me back that cigar-case."

And she weekly returned it, and was reformed!

[THE END.]

TINY square panes of translucent oyster shells, instead of glass, are an unique feature of houses and offices in Manila. The windows measure on the average six feet long and four feet wide and contain two hundred and sixty of these oyster-shell panes, which temper the fierce glare of the sun in the building. In a country where many people go blind from the constant sunshine this is a precaution very necessary to be taken. The streets of Manila are modern. They are perfectly straight, macadamized, and provided with ample granite walks. Of these the Ecolta and the Rosario are the best. In both there are excellent shops, kept principally by Chinese merchants, most of whom come from Amoy. Tin-roofed houses line each side of both thoroughfares.

## THE BRIDE'S OMEN.

—TOP—

## CHAPTER III.

"You will come, won't you, Miss Alline? It will all be quite incomplete without your presence."

The Laird of Forfarren sat on the window-sill of the morning room at Dalleron, as the Stuart's small house was named.

It might have looked odd to see a stalwart figure in tweed seated on a window-sill, if there had been anyone to look, but the house was a little way out of Braemar, and the trees in the kitchen garden were well leaved and hid that part from sight, and there were not many passers-by at the best of times, for Dalleron was not on the high road, which accounted for its remarkable cheapness, as it was a pretty little place, with a sweet wilderness of a garden around it, stocked with old-fashioned flowers, plants, and herbs, that was looking its best on this last day of April, showing that "costly summer was at hand," coming tripping quickly on the heels of an exceptionally mild spring.

Winter was over—cold, bleak winter—of that there was abundant proof. Along the road the hedge-rows made undulating green rivers; the banks were dappled with primroses, while the lady-socks were beginning to flourish in all their beauty, keeping company with the wood anemones and dog-violets, and encouraging the bluebells to appear; the nests of the thrushes and blackbirds were hid snugly and cosily behind a drapery of fresh green leafage. The horse-chestnut were getting well furnished, preparatory to their cones swelling into flowers; the oaks yellowing at the tips; the maples opening for the sun-god's rays; the hawthorns in full leaf. The cuckoo called perpetually in an adjacent wood, where a missel-thrush and some of his brethren kept up an unending chorus.

All nature was bright and fresh and pleasant to look at; and so was Alline, as she sat in the bay-window seat in a white washing gown, a bunch of violets at her throat, and a bowl of gooseberries on her knee, at which she was daintily working, heading and tailing the little green marbles, while the laird watched the white hands fluttering to and fro with a tender look in his dark eyes.

"You will come, won't you?" he repeated.

"Of course," she answered, promptly. "I would not miss seeing it on any account."

"Thanks," he murmured, rapturously.

"Only fancy, I have never seen a maypole, nor the lads and lasses dancing around it in all their holiday finery."

"No, so you told me," he responded, not adding that that was the sole reason of his having had one erected on his estate for the morrow's gala, in order that she might see it; for he had received a hint from this would-be mamma-in-law to be cautious in his wooing, lest he might scare the bird, and lose all chance of trapping her for his nest.

"Did I?"

"Yes, a long time ago."

"And you remembered it?"

"Yes, I remember most things you say."

"That is because we are friends, I suppose," with a girlish laugh.

"Of course," he agreed, refraining from remarking that there was a far more potent reason for his good memory with regard to anything she said or did.

"And what is the pole to be like?"

"As high as the mast of a vessel of a hundred tons."

"Good gracious! what a height!"

"Yes, it sounds tall, doesn't it?"

"Very tall. And will it look like the mast of a vessel?"

"At first, when it is planted, not afterwards; for it will be dressed up with ribbons, and flowers and things."

"Like those?" nodding at a posy of lovely roses he had brought her from the Forfarren conservatories.

"Partly, but mostly it will be decked with

May... You know that is the very flower that was selected one May-day morning in the Middle Ages to be brought home with sound of tabor, and flourish of horn, and put on post, and lintel, and window-sill."

"Was it really? I did not know," and she looked at him with her beautiful eyes full of inquiry. "Tell me more about it."

"Well, it was a very popular custom at one time. Kings and queens were not above giving their royal approval of it. I read once that bluff King Hal used to go out with Catherine of Aragon to Shooter's Hill to meet the Corporation of London as they returned from bringing from the Kent fields their May-day trophies."

"How funny! I should so like to have seen it!"

"I daresay. You never can see bluff King Hal now."

"Of course not. Is Shooter's Hill a pretty place?"

"Yes, very, considering how near London it is."

"I wish I could see it, it would be a spot full of interest to me."

"Perhaps you will see it, some day," he rejoined, thinking as he gazed at her face how much he would like to take her there and show her all the other pretty spots without London, and all the wonders within.

"No, I'm afraid not," she said, shaking her golden head until it glinted again in the sunrays. "We have never been further than Edinburgh; I am sure father could not afford such a long, expensive journey."

"Some one else might take you," hazarded the laird.

"There is no one who could or would."

"Isn't there?" he thought.

"We have very few relatives, and none of them rich enough to go to the expense of taking me such a trip."

"It need not be a relative, a friend might——" he began; but the opportune arrival of Aline's mother interrupted the *tête-à-tête*; opportunity, for had he spoken then he would have met with a refusal to the offer of his hand, heart, and fortune.

The next day, May-day, dawned bright and beautiful. The sky was clear blue, the sunshine steady, the wind blowing softly from the west, in the air a sweet promise of coming summer.

Aline thought there could not be a better day for the Maypole sports, as she doffed an elaborately-embroidered white dress, which Mrs. Stuart had pinched and starved and practised many mean little shifts in order to be able to buy, since she learnt Jock Gordon's fancy for colourless clothing.

He was certainly right, white suited Aline far better than anything else; she looked simply lovely as she descended from the shabby fly at Forfar, and he came down the broad flight of steps to greet her and her parents, his heart throbbing high with the hope that some day this beautiful girl would be mistress of his home, bound to him by the closest, most enduring, most tender tie that can bind man and woman together.

But if he looked with longing at her, so did another, and with a greater longing, for he felt it was almost a hopeless one—and that other was Kenneth Macleod.

He had come to the May-day gathering sorely against his will in one way—for he did not wish to be guest to the man he knew was his rival—though he was glad enough to seize the opportunity of seeing her once again, for Mrs. Stuart had managed to keep Aline out of his way; but his sister Helen would not refuse the invitation. Invitations were rare in and about Braemar, and as there was no one else to take her Kenneth had to make virtue a necessity; and there he was on the laird's lawn, talking to two bonnie Scotch lasses, while his eyes were fixed on Aline's face, drinking in all the fair loveliness of it.

It was not long before he found his way to her side.

Gordon, in his capacity of host, had his hands full, and could not linger, as he would have wished, near her. He had to be about and

doing, and left the coast clear for Kenneth, who was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

"It is a long while since we last met," he said, when they had sauntered a little way from the chattering crowd.

"Yes, isn't it?" she agreed. "We used to meet so often; I can't imagine why it is we have not done so lately. Were you at the Macgregor's dance last Thursday?"

"Yes, and expected to see you there."

"We were going. Mr. Gordon was to drive us over; but, at the last moment, business prevented him, so mother would not go."

"Ah! I see!"

His tone was full of the bitterness that surged in his heart.

"I was awfully disappointed," he went on, "when I found you did not come."

"Were you?" she asked, looking up at him with a shy smile, and then dropping her eyes at once when she encountered the ardent gaze of his.

"The pleasure of my evening was quite spoiled."

"Oh! Why?"

"Because I only want to see you; and when I found you were not there, I was disgusted, and left as soon as I could."

"Was not that a pity?" she murmured, with blushing cheeks. "I heard it was a nice dance."

"I dare say it was to those who were interested in the guests present. You see, my interest centred elsewhere."

She made no response to this. She was silent, a feeling of shy delight keeping her so; for had he not as much as told her that his interest centred in her! It was the dawn of love to her—"Love's young dream"—and it filled her heart with a rare pleasure that would never come to her again in all her life.

"Shall I see you Tuesday night, at Cameron's gathering?" he went on, a new look full of fire in his blue eyes, bent so earnestly on her face.

"Yes," she responded, "I shall be there."

"I want you to promise me quite half the programme. Will you?"

"It is a great many," she hesitated, a vision of her maternal relative's angry face flashing before her mind's eye.

"And I have a great deal to say to you," he pleaded. "Something of importance to myself, on which will depend the whole happiness of my future life. Promise!" he urged, as he saw her mother approaching.

"I promise," she murmured, faintly.

"Aline," said Mrs. Stuart, in pompous tones, "the dance round the Maypole is about to begin; if you wish to see it you had better come. I will relieve you of your charge, Mr. Macleod."

"Pray don't!" he said, earnestly. "Let me escort you there." And as she had no excuse ready, she was obliged to accede to his request, to her own intense annoyance and mortification; for, as they arrived in the field in which the pole reared its flower-crowned head, Gordon came to meet them, and his eyes rested on Macleod in a questioning way, while a shade fell across his face.

More than once he looked again at his younger rival, while the country lads and lasses footed it away, right merrily around the Maypole, singing and dancing with a will, and waving their sweet-scented garlands high in the air, for Macleod kept his ground by Aline's side, and there was a something—a look, a light on her face, as she listened to Kenneth's conversation—that set the Laird a-thinking, and determined him on speaking to his tried friend and ally, Jessie Stuart.

"Mrs. Stuart, pardon me," he commenced, drawing her aside from the merrymaking crew to the comparative seclusion of the rose garden, "but you know, I am sure, what an interest—what a very great interest—I take in your daughter, and all that concerns her!"

"Thanks, yes; I ken ye are vera kind aboot the bairn," she exclaimed, in her excitement, forgetting her elegant vernacular and relapsing into broad Scotch, for she hoped a permission to woo was going to be asked for.

"Well," he went on, with considerable hesita-

tion, "I want to—know—to the best of your belief—is she heart-whole?"

"Why, bless me, yes! What makes you ask such a vera queer question?"

"Forgive me, if you deem it an impertinence."

"No, no! not from you!" she hastened to assure him.

"I thought," he continued, still with great hesitation, "that—that she and young Macleod were very good friends—that perhaps they were engaged!"

"By no means," returned his companion, with a bland smile, feeling, nevertheless, as though a painful cold water had been poured down her back, "Good friends they are, certainly; but nothing more, I assure you. Helen Macleod, his sister, is Aline's most intimate crony, and that of course, accounts for his civility to her."

"Of course, of course," assented Gordon, feeling much relieved in his mind. "I did not know that. He is so attentive, I quite thought it was a case!"

Mrs. Stuart felt inclined to rap out a naughty word; but she managed to control her feelings, and repeat her assurances and denials, cleverly insinuating that if Aline had a leaning towards anyone it was towards Jock himself—a remark that made him feel extremely, nay foolishly, happy, and go back to his guests and his Maypole with renewed lightness of heart; while his whimsical companion determined, there and then, to play a dangerous card, and try appealing to Kenneth himself to retire from the field, and leave the course clear for his wealthy rival.

She sought him for some time in vain; but towards evening, when dancing had commenced amongst the gentry in the great hall at Forfar, she found him leaning against the wall, watching Aline, as she floated by in Gordon's arms.

"Mr. Macleod, can I have a word with you? Can you spare me a few moments?" she asked, touching his arm.

"As many as you wish," he answered, politely and readily, a foreboding of something wrong coming at his heart, nevertheless.

And this foreboding proved true. Cleverly and unspurtingly she put the case before him, painting, with no unskillful hand, the life that would be Aline's if she married him—allied herself with poverty; and then showing the other side of the picture—the brilliant future that would be hers if she became mistress of Forfar; finally appealing to his sense of honour and his love for Aline to induce him to give her up.

In silence he listened, giving no sign of the inward pain that raged in his breast, the war that was going on; and when she finished, he only said, quietly,—

"You are right, Mrs. Stuart. As a man of honour, the only thing I can do is to leave Braemar and relinquish every hope of happiness in giving up your daughter!"

She had touched the right chord. Kenneth Macleod's honour was at stake, and he threw happiness into the other scale, and won the battle!

He sought his sister at once, and left Forfar.

Vainly Aline's eyes wandered round, seeking the well-known form. It was nowhere to be seen, and she went home that night feeling that May-day sports, after all, were not so very amusing.

#### CHAPTER IV.

MACLEOD had given his promise to Mrs. Stuart not to see her daughter again, save once to say adieu, and that once he determined should be at the Cameron's dance.

Restless and miserable, eager to get over the painful interview, he arrived there, but the one he sought did not appear until close upon midnight.

These were always Mrs. Stuart's tactics. She would bring Aline into a room at a late hour, looking cool and fresh and sweet, without a ribbon tossed, or a flounce crumpled, or a braid disarranged, when other women were flushed with dancing, their hair towed, their gowns

torn and limp from the crush, and her beauty would strike on all male observers with fresh force.

On this occasion she looked very beautiful, yet pale, he thought, or was it the blue dress he wondered? He waited for two dances before he claimed her, and then he began in rather an abrupt fashion,

"This is the only dance I shall ask for, Miss Stuart."

"Why?" she exclaimed, looking at him rather wistfully. "Is it because we are so late?"

"Partly," he returned, sealing himself against the pleading look in the soft blue eyes.

"Have you to leave early?"

"Yes." For the life of him he could not have uttered another word. Something seemed to rise in his throat and choke him. A mist swam before his eyes, and for a minute the strong repression of his feelings made him almost unconscious.

"You remember," he went on after a while, when he had recovered his normal composure somewhat, "that I told you I had something to say to you to-night?"

"Yes," she assented, the wondering look on her face growing greater, for his face was pale and set, and his manner by no means that of an ardent and anxious lover.

"It is not of a very pleasant nature, at least to myself; and, as we have been friends, I venture to think you may care to hear it, and share, in a lesser degree, my feelings."

"Yes," she said again, turning white as snow, a fear overwhelming her heart, robbing the fair cheek of its rose.

"Circumstances have arisen that necessitate my almost instant departure from Braesmar."

"Mr. Macleod!" There was a world of anguish in those two words, and he bit his lips fiercely to keep back the torrent of tender, loving words that rose to them.

"I leave by the early morning train!"

"So soon!" The deep, pathetic eyes looked into his for an instant in pale, but not in reproach.

"Yes."

"And—when—will you return?"

Only the pitiful falter in the clear tones, and her deathly whiteness, betrayed her agitation. She was too unused to the world's ways to hide those, or even to make an attempt to do so.

"That is uncertain!"

"Do—you—think—your stay away will be of long duration?"

"Probably very long—in fact, I may never return!"

Once more Aline's eyes met his, speaking some intolerable pain for which her lips could frame no language.

He could not interpret this. He did not understand. Only he seemed to know then how she cared for him—how much he was to her.

"Then—this is—good-bye?" Her sweet voice was full of grief.

"Alas! yes," he answered.

"You know," he went on suddenly, as it flashed across him that she would, to say the least of it, think this conduct, this sudden running away, strange, "that I would not go if I could help it. That I would much rather stay!"

"And—can you not—stay?" she asked, faintly.

"No!" he answered, firmly, while his heart was wrung with agony. "It is impossible. I must go!"

And, forgetting prudence, he begged her to remember him—to think of him kindly sometimes.

"I shall never forget you," she answered, quietly; so quietly that her calmness deceived him a little, and he thought now the first shock was over she might recover, and forget him after awhile.

In that he was wrong. Aline Stuart was not the kind of girl to forget one she had loved as tenderly as she had Kenneth Macleod, and when he clasped her hands with a lingering pressure, and saying his last "Good-bye," turned and left her, the best and brightest part of her youth

and life went with him, and she was never quite the same again—so girlish, so lighthearted.

"Miss Aline, are you ill? What is the matter? Can I get you anything? Take my arm!"

Gordon's voice broke in on her musings, her dreaminess. She never knew whether she had stood there, by the great palm in the conservatory, a minute or an hour—stood just where Kenneth left her, the musical plash of the fountain going on with regular monotony, the sweet perfume of the flowers heavy in the air, the vase music rising and falling.

She was lost to all around, regardless of the flight of time, and might have stood there longer in that cool, dim retreat, only the laird's voice roused her.

"Are you ill?" he repeated, anxiously.

"Ill—oh, no. I am not ill," she returned, with a laugh that sounded harsh and discordant even to her own ears.

"Then why are you standing here?"

"To get cool."

"But you ought to be cool now."

"Why?"

"Because you have been here a very long time."

"Have I? Yes, of course!" she added, quickly, knowing and feeling that she must not show her feelings—dare not wear the willow; "too long, rather. I am ready to go now. Will you take me back to mother?"

"No!" he answered, promptly; "but I'll take you back to the ball-room!"

"Is this our dance?"

"It is. Are you too tired for it?"

"Not at all. I shall enjoy it," she replied, laying her little white-gloved hand on his arm, and returning with him to the ball-room, where the glare of the lights almost blinded her eyes, heavy with the smart of mused tears, and the music and hum of many voices sounded like crashing thunder in her ears.

She hardly knew what she was doing. Kenneth had left her—he had passed out of her life, for eyes—she knew not why. Only she was conscious of a fierce pain at her heart that made every beat an agony; and so, to hide the deadly wound from prying eyes, she laughed and talked rather wildly—was the gayest of the gay, and with flushed cheeks and brilliant, if sad eyes, was certainly the belle of the room and fascinated Gordon more than ever.

He saw nothing amiss with her—only she seemed more lovely, more piquant than he had ever seen her before; and he determined ere long to put the momentous question on the answer to which his future happiness depended.

From this rash proceeding, however, he was dissuaded by Mrs. Stuart, who knew her daughter's heart was too sore to brook, yet awhile, thoughts of a new lover, and that failure would inevitably follow; so she artfully reasoned and argued with him, and he consented to wait until autumn or winter.

Meanwhile his mother-in-law, that was to be, was not idle. With consummate skill she worked upon the girl, who was plastic as wax in her clever hands, and by judicious praise of Gordon, and equally judicious abuse of Macleod, she managed to wean Aline's thoughts from the absent ones and turn them to the man who was her patient admirer.

Little by little her determination never to forget Kenneth—never to listen to words of love from another man—was undermined. If she had none of her mother's vulgarity she was certainly largely endowed with her father's weakness and irresolution.

Besides, her vanity was hurt. Not knowing the true state of the case, it did seem strange to her that the man who had passed as her lover, paid her the most marked attention, should suddenly, without any warning, depart, leaving her to bear the brunt of any nasty remarks which her dear lady friends might wish to make; and, being jealous of her superior charms, the Braesmar fair ones did make remarks, and, simple and childlike though she was, they stung her to the quick, and many and many a time brought a scorching blush of shame and agony to her fair cheek as she listened to sarcastic remarks aimed at her faithless lover—for so she deemed him, not

knowing the treacherous part her own mother had played in the affair.

The laird's attentions were balm to her wounded feelings, though she was scarcely conscious of it when she turned to him in her distress, and, seeking to forget her sorrow, threw herself with a will into all his plans and projects; and while he fondly fancied she listened to his long disquisitions on the improvement of his estates, because they were his, she was trying to shut out from her heart and life all memory of that fair handsome face that had been inexplicably dear to her.

So matters went on—summer merged into autumn, and autumn in turn gave place to hoary-headed winter, and yet not a word had she heard from the absent one, and yet had the laird curbed his eager desire to ask her to be his wife.

But he would wait no longer, he told himself—the New Year was at hand, and he meant it to be the happiest of his whole life, or the most miserable.

Mrs. Stuart, consulted, at last gave her consent to the proposal being made—not that she had withheld it because she wanted to, simply from motives of caution.

She was more than eager to be mother-in-law to the Laird of Forfarrae, but knew precipitancy would ruin all.

In those dark days before and about Christmastide, Gordon was much at the Stuart's house, and intuitively Aline knew what was coming.

She was happy and miserable, glad and sorry, all at once. She could not analyse her feelings; hardly dared to do so, only she felt a keen sense of gratitude towards Jock, because he had poured balm into her wounds—deep wounds that left an inefaceable scar behind—and because his devotion had lessened her grief and regret for the renegade who had left her.

So on New Year's Eve, when she was sitting alone in the quaint, oak-wainscoted parlor listening to the bells ringing merrily, and Jock Gordon came to her, and told her in a straightforward, manly way, how very dear she was to him, and how he had hoped for some time past that she would become his wife, cheer, and gladden his life, and his home with her sweet presence; she, shy and tremulous, put her hands in his and murmured "Yes" to his pleading, giving him the crowning blessing of his life, making him rarely happy, for he had not been sure of winning her—Mrs. Stuart having duly impressed him with a deep sense of Aline's loveliness and worth, and the number of offers—all imaginary ones—that she had received from great personages.

He was truly grateful for the joy that came into his life with Aline's acceptance of his proposal, and felt he could not do enough for his beautiful fiancee to show his affection. For her a new era commenced. He loaded her with costly presents; he drove her about in his phaeton and carriage; he anticipated every wish, was a most humble, attentive, and devoted lover, and yet—and yet—with all the brilliant prospect that lay before her, the future mistress of Forfarrae was not quite happy.

Struggle as she would to subdue it, her love for Kenneth triumphed at times, and despite her efforts, the recollection of his blue eyes and winning ways would come to her, blotting out the present, making her live once again through those hours that had been fraught with so much sweetness, such subtle delight, that she knew could never come to her again in all the days of her life, notwithstanding that she had won the lasting affection of a true, good man.

"I have not given you a ring," he said, some days after the engagement was ratified. "Have you wondered why?"

"A little," she acknowledged.

"Well, this is my reason. Here is an old family ring—a wedding-ring—one that my ancestors have used for upwards of two hundred years," opening a case and displaying a queer-looking red gold ring of peculiar shape and design; "each Gordon has given it to the lady of his love as a pledge ring—will you wear it too, or will you only don this?" showing a costly sparkling diamond of modern workmanship.

"I will wear the old ring, please," stretching out her hand; and as he slipped it on to her slender finger she asked, "Is there a story attached to it?"

"Yes, only an old woman's tale, though."

"What is it?"

"Oh, some rubbish about its snapping in half the night before the last Gordon of Forfarrean is to die. I am the last of my race, and I don't look much like dying, do I?" with a glance at his broad shoulders and deep chest in the mirror opposite.

"No. Still, it is a queer notion. I wonder how the idea was started?" she went on, looking a little pale, and regarding the ring as if it were a snake.

"By some old crone, you may be sure, who had nothing to do with invent fables. Don't look so scared or I shall be sorry I told you the story. Put this on," slipping the diamond on, "and don't think anything more about it."

But somehow or the other Aline's thoughts constantly reverted to it, and she regarded the red gold circlet with secret horror, though she always wore it to please her lover.

#### CHAPTER V.

"WHAT a lovely ring! what a pendant! You are a lucky girl. I wish I stood in your shoes."

The speaker was Helen Macleod, who had recently returned to Braemar, and she was admiring Aline's jewels.

It was Valentine's day, and she, with a troop of other girls and some young men, was enjoying the laird's hospitality at Forfarrean. They had been in the grounds skating on the frozen lake, and now they all stood round a blazing log-fire in the library, enjoying afternoon tea. The girls were wrapped in velvets and furs, Aline in a set of priceless sables, that were at once the envy and admiration of her less fortunate friends, while Jock Gordon looked handsome and distinguished in a greatcoat trimmed with the same dark fur.

They were all chatting and laughing gaily, as young people will when together, forgetful of all the woe and wretchedness in the world; for there was something to think of going to happen, a great event in quiet Braemar-cum-Tweed—no less a thing than a wedding, and a grand one too, for in a week's time Aline Stuart was to become Aline Gordon, and the juketing and merry-making was to be of no ordinary kind.

Meanwhile, Helen Macleod, unconscious of the pain she was inflicting, continued to admire her friend's possessions, and envy her the future that lay before her, in ringing tones that were so like Kenneth's that they struck on Aline's ear with a keen pain, and she was glad when the dressing-bell rang and she could escape to her own room and from the gaze of those blue eyes, so like another pair that haunted a dim corner of her memory yet.

She recovered herself somewhat at dinner, under the cheering influence of Gordon's kindly and tender glances, and entered with spirit and zest into the fun afterwards started by Miss Macleod, who burned herself in the log fire by proxy—a nut—to see if her lover would prove true, and poured melted lead into a basin of water, and did many other things, even venturing into the garden and pulling up a plant, to see if it had much or little earth about its roots, in order that she might know if her future husband's income would be large or small.

Her companions followed her lead with much laughter and many blushes, and then someone suggested the "Luggies."

"Of course we must have these!" cried Helen. "Aline must try her fate—try 'The Bride's Omen'."

"No, no!" said the girl, shrinking back, and turning pale, "I would rather not."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Helen, and "Oh, do!" called out the others; and at last, yielding to persuasion, she allowed her eyes to be bandaged, and advanced with uncertain steps towards the table, where three shallow dishes

were arranged, one containing pure water, another foul, and the third being empty.

Anxiously all watched her. If she put her hand in the foul water, much trouble lay before her; if in the clear, her married life would be all sunshine and happiness; but if she dipped her hand into the empty lugsy there would be no wedding that day week—at least, so the superstition ran.

Slowly she advanced—slowly, slowly—hesitated a moment, then stretched out her hand, and dipped it into the empty lugsy.

There was silence for a minute or two, which was broken by Jock's cheery voice crying "The omen won't hold good in your case, Aline!"

"I hope not," she responded, in low tones, as she loosed the handkerchief from her eyes with trembling hands, while her lips quivered and her cheeks turned ashen pale.

Her betrothed tried to rally her, but with ill-success; and somehow or other everyone's spirits seemed to fail to a zero, the fun lagged, and grew gradually less; and finally they all took their leave and dispersed, the laird driving Aline home.

"Good-bye, love!" he said, tenderly, when they arrived at Dalleron, as he turned to remount into the dog-cart.

"Good-bye, dear Jock!" she said, more fondly than she had ever spoken before.

"This is the last time we need say that to each other," he said, looking at her, a passionate gleam in his dark eye. "When we meet again it will be to part no more. Are you glad?"

"Yes," she murmured, as his arm closed round her, and she felt his kiss on her lips.

"Not good-bye, *au revoir*," he whispered, as, with a last caress, he sprang in, and, gathering up the reins, drove off rapidly.

She watched him while he was in sight, the moonlight making it light almost as day; and then, with a sigh, she went into her home, knowing that she would not see him again until her wedding morn, for he was going up to Edinburgh on important business, and would only reach Forfarrean early on the morning of the day which was to see those twain made one.

In after-days she often thought of him as she had last seen him, sitting erect and square in his dog-cart, his handsome head rising out from the great collar of sables, the moonlight fall in his face, showing up its dark beauty; and she was glad to think her farewell had been kind to him.

The days fled swiftly by. She was busy—more than busy—with dressmakers and milliners, and each morning she received a long letter from Jock, breathing love and devotion in every line.

She had little time to think, and kept her thoughts from the past, determining to do her duty by the man who was to be her husband.

The wedding-day dawned at last. Clear, cold, bright—something more than a suspicion of frost in the crisp air.

As Aline looked out at the bright blue sky and golden sunshine, glinting on the stainless snow, that made the earth so fair, sharp pain struck at her heart as she thought "what might have been," and what perfect happiness would be hers if the groom was Kenneth instead of Jock. It seemed hard that fate was so dead against her, and the man she loved. Her life was spoiled, her hopes wrecked; she seemed to realize that as she had never done before, as she stood at the window of her room, looking out over the white world with wistful eyes, idly twisting the old wedding-ring round and round on her slender finger; then dreamingly she slipped it off and looked at it with the old feeling of horror. And then—she could never tell how it happened, whether she held it awkwardly, or pressed on it, but it snapped in her hands and fell in two.

She was not superstitious, not given to thinking every little thing a bad omen, and yet as she gazed at the broken halves a chill, deadly fear fell on her, a presentiment of coming ill, terrible disaster. She trembled as she looked at the riven circlet that had bound so many faithful wives to so many tender, loving husbands, and thought of the story Jock had told her in connection with it. What would happen? Some-

thing awful, she felt. This slender thread of gold would not bind her to him now.

"What would he do?" she wondered dully, still looking at it. "Would he have it mended and give it to her to wear by-and-by, or would he keep it now as a relic?"

Her eyes grew misty as she gazed, and she would have remained there longer staring at the shattered trinket, only the voices of her bridesmaids, coming to help her to robe herself in the spotless, shimmering silk that lay on the bed, roused her from her dreamy state, and with a deep sigh she put it in its case, and opening the door let in the troop of bright, young girls, who chattered and laughed right merrily as they arrayed the bride in her snowy garments.

"Jock has not arrived," whispered Mrs. Stuart to Aline, when the latter descended to the drawing-room, looking lovely in her bridal attire and blusher.

"Has he not?" she murmured, that chill, indescribable fear again numbing her heart.

"No; I can't understand it."

"Perhaps he is late, and will go straight to the church," suggested Mr. Stuart timidly.

"That must be it," agreed his wife at once. "It won't do to wait much longer," she added, glancing at the clock, for time was short. "We had better start. Of course he is there."

"Oh, mother!" expostulated Aline, a deeper blush dying her cheek at the thought of going to the church, not knowing if her groom was there or no.

"Now, don't make a fuss," rejoined Mrs. Stuart, in a fierce whisper. "If you are to be married at all we must go now;" and without more ado, without another glance at the shrinking girl, she got into one of the Forfarrean carriages, and telling the bridesmaids and others assembled to take their places in the different carriages waiting, drove off to the quaint little church some half a mile distant, followed by the others.

The bride was the last to leave, as her father helped her in he felt her hand tremble, and pressed it tenderly, asking if she were cold. She replied in the negative, and, truth to tell, it was not the atmosphere that made her shiver but an inward feeling of horror and depression which she could not shake off.

The groomsmen came forward as the carriage drew up, but Aline's eyes sought in vain for the stalwart, manly figure of her lover. He was nowhere to be seen.

"He has not arrived," announced Mrs. Stuart to her spouse in a sepulchral whisper. "What can have happened?"

"I don't know. An accident, I fear," he responded. "Have you sent to Forfarrean?"

"Yes, a messenger has just gone, and another to Dalleron, to tell him to come on if he be there. We must wait now till they return or he comes."

And wait they did. The bride with down-drooped head, ashen cheeks, and trembling hands, her mother with ill-concealed impatience, her father with equally ill-concealed anxiety, while the bridesmaids, huddled together like a flock of frightened sheep, and the groomsmen stood at the door staring down the road to catch the first glimpse of this "laggerd in love," for so they deemed him, while the clergymen and the clerk tried ineffectually to keep themselves warm in the vestry.

It was a wretched half-hour. Everyone was cold, everyone was anxious, and Aline was overwhelmed with shame and fear. She felt relieved when the minister approached her father and said,

"There can be no wedding to-day," as he heard the old clock in the tower chime out twelve.

"No wedding!" exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, furiously. "There must be; there shall be. The laird went to get a special licence, I ken t'."

"I have not seen it."

"No matter, he will bring it with him."

"When he does the marriage can proceed."

"Of course it will. Ah! here he is," as a clatter of horse's hoofs was heard on the frost-hardened road, and all turned simultaneously towards the door, while Aline raised her drooping head, a gleam of hope in her blue eyes.

But the gleam died away, and gave place to a scared look of fear as one of the Forfarren grooms entered the church, his face deathly pale, the perspiration pouring off his brow, showing the pace at which he had come.

"Where is your master?" demanded Mrs. Stuart, imperiously.

"Master can't come," returned the man, bluntly.

"Can't come! What do you mean, man!"

"He has met with an accident!" blurted out the fellow.

"Ah!" burst from the bride's white lips. "Let me go to him." And rising, she went towards the door followed by all the others, and in a few moments they were speeding along the snow-covered roads as fast as the drivers dare go.

Meanwhile Mr. Stuart, after a hasty consultation with the groom, sprang into a dog-cart belonging to one of the groomsmen, and, whipping up the horse, tore along at such a rate that he out-distanced all the others.

A strange stillness seemed to lay on Forfarren. The winter sun shone on its hoary walls and cased windows, lighting up the vivid green of the mosses and lichens that crept and clung over the rugged stones of which it was composed; but no sound came from within, only on the steps stood a group of scared servants.

"Is—is—he dead!" faltered Aline's father.

"Yes, sir," returned the man. "He has been dead some hours."

"Good heavens! Who is to tell her?" and he looked along the road down which was bowling at a great rate the barouche, harnessed by the four greys, in which he knew were his daughter and wife.

There was no time to be lost, and yet, weak and irresolute, he stood there, trembling and pale; and when Aline alighted from the carriage, in all her bridal finery, and saw his face, she guessed the worst.

"He is dead!" she cried. And then, as no one denied it, she threw up her hands, with a moan of anguish, and covered her face with them.

"Take me to him," she whispered, hoarsely.

"No, no!" expostulated her mother, laying a restraining hand on her arm. But for once she shook it off, and followed her father to the library, where Jock Gordon lay.

He looked as though asleep, so peaceful was the expression. There was no pain on the handsome face. There was a noble beauty on the marble brow; the long dark lashes lay like a fringe on his pale cheeks; the curves of his lips were set in a smile.

"The omen was true, then!" she murmured, as she stooped to kiss the clay-cold lips. "The ring did not break for nothing!"

"How did it happen? Of what did he die?" she asked.

And briefly they told her how the tollgate-keeper at Richter, about three miles from Forfarren, was surprised to find a dog-cart at his gate early that morning, and the laird sitting in it, apparently indifferent to everything surrounding him. Closer inspection revealed the fact that he was a corpse.

He was on his way back from Edinburgh; and although it was evident he had been dead some time, yet the horse's knowledge of the road enabled him to continue on the journey without guidance until the closed tollgate obliged him to pull up.

Heart disease of long standing, the doctors declared it, brought to a climax by the excitement attendant on his expected wedding.

Silently Aline listened, a tall white-clad figure, strangely out of keeping with the dusk of that still death-room; and then, when all was told, she stooped and kissed him once again, murmuring, "Poor Jock—poor love," and then turning, left the room with uncertain steps, leaning heavily on her father's arm; and he, for once in a way, took matters into his own hands, and drove her home to Dallaroon, and left her alone in the solitude of her own room to those sad thoughts that crowded so thickly on her.

She had not loved him, but she had liked and respected him, and his awfully sudden death

was a fearful shock to her. Once again she saw him.

The night before the funeral, she begged her father to take her to that house which was to have seen the dawn of her married life! and he, notwithstanding his wife's objections, took her.

Silently she crept into the room, where he lay in his coffin—white flowers on his breast, and making a pillow for his head, their sweet fragrance breathing around on the air of the death-chamber—and laid the broken halves of the old wedding-ring on his breast. No one else should ever wear it. He was the last of his race, and it should be buried with him. Then, with a last look, a last kiss, she left him, praying his soul might find that rest and happiness which it had missed on earth.

Ten years passed away. Aline's beauty was not less, yet she was greatly altered. The old girlish look of innocent joy was gone, and in its place was one of chastened grief, vain regret.

To her mother's wrath and indignation, she refused all offers with serene coolness, though Mrs. Stuart was wrong in attributing the refusals entirely to Gordon's sudden and sad death.

She mourned him sincerely and revered his memory, yet ever in her heart dwelt the memory of Kenneth's blue eyes; and when, after years of waiting, he came to her a rich man, and finding her still unwedded, put that question which he had meant to put ten years before at the Cameron's gathering, she laid her hands in his, giving herself to him with a glad "Yes," knowing that at last she had reached a haven of rest and repose.

"And you really love me?" he queried, bending his blue eyes fondly on her.

"I have always loved you," she answered, simply.

"And—yet—once—you meant to marry another!"

"My mother wished it, and so did he," she responded, while a shadow for an instant dimmed the renewed brightness of her fair face; "and—you—left me."

"I did it for the best, Aline," he said, earnestly. "Believe me, I did. We must be cruel to be kind, sometimes."

"I know," she answered, gently, for she had gathered something of the truth, during the past years, regarding his abrupt departure.

"And you forgive?"

"Fully and freely."

"My own," and he gathered her to his breast—her rightful resting place—and kissed her lips with all the pent-up passion of ten long years.

[THE END.]

BURGLAR-PROOF glass has been invented by a clever manufacturer. It is made by pouring molten glass over a network of steel wire. It is specially adapted for skylights and jewellers' windows.

There are two kinds of Chinese beds, and both are arranged for a complete shutting in by means of hanging curtains and tapestry. The expensive kind is like a sort of cage, having a flat, wooden roof, just the size of the bed proper, supported at a height of about eight feet from the floor on four corner-posts and two intermediate ones. Then there is a sort of frieze or entablature work running around horizontally, above and below, so that when you are in bed you are safely penned in a sort of cage, and cannot possibly tumble out. The carvings on these beds are sometimes very rich, and they cost much; but the ordinary and cheaper kind is made of two frames of wood, shaped something like the skeleton of an old-fashioned "settle," which are stood up on the floor facing each other. A mattress is placed on the projecting parts of these frames, and a couple of slight sticks across the top; then curtains and hangings shut all in, and make it look as pretty as the taste and money of the owner are able. Inside there is a cotton quilt, laid on the mattress frame. The occupant of the bed lies on this, having a little roll of stuff for the head, and for covering a very thick cotton quilt.

# EPPS'S COCOAINE COCOA-NIB EXTRACT. (Tea-like).

The choicest roasted nibs (broken-up beans) of the natural Cocoa on being subjected to powerful hydraulic pressure, give forth their excess of oil, leaving for us a finely-flavoured powder—"Cocoaine," a product which, when prepared with boiling water, has the consistency of tea, of which it is now, with many, beneficially taking the place. Its active principle being a gentle nerve stimulant, supplies the needed energy without unduly exciting the system. Sold only in labelled tins. If unable to obtain it of your tradesman, a tin will be sent post free for 9 stamps.

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Quickly and certainly remove all obstructions, arising from any cause, whatever, where Steel and Pennyroyal fail. Invaluable to women. By post, under cover, for 1s and 2s stamps from THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, 21, Hagley Road, Birmingham. Please mention LONDON READER.

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## £20 TOBACCONISTS COMMENCING.

See III. Guide (30s postpaid). How to open & fit up shop. £2 to £20. TOBACCONISTS' EQUIPMENT, &c., 100, Weston Road, London.

The largest and original house (50 years' experience). Manager, H. MYERS.

## FACETTE.

"If you insist upon knowing, there are two reasons for my refusing you." "And they are?" "Yourself and another man."

He : "Your sweet face is my book of life. I swear it." She : "But your oath is not valid until you have kissed the book."

JOHNSON : "Pa, what's the difference between punctuation and punctuation?" Pa : "Not a great deal, my son. They both cause one to stop."

JACK : "How did you know I was going to call, my dear?" Her Little Sister : I saw Beadle taking all the pins out of her waistband."

HOJACK : "Why are you consulting the dictionary? I thought you knew how to spell?" Tomdik : I do. I am not looking for information, but for corroboration."

RICHARD : "They say he gave you a black eye?" Robert : "That's the way folks exaggerate. I had the eye already. He merely laid on the colour."

SHE (at the theatre) : "I don't understand what the detective is supposed to be doing in this piece." He : "I fancy he is looking for the plot."

SHE : "Do you know that married men, as a rule, live longer than bachelors?" He : "Oh, I don't believe that. It only seems longer to them."

HICKS : "Do you think it will pay me to read Brosher's book?" Wicks : "I think it will. It will relieve you of all desire ever to read anything else from his pen."

JENKINS : "Whenever I get home late and hear my wife upstairs, my heart always goes down into my boots. Doesn't yours?" Adamson : "No. I always take my boots off."

BOND : "Don't you realise that marriage broadens a man?" Benedict : "Oh, yes, I suppose it can be put that way; but 'flattens' is the word I've always used!"

BILKINS : "I called at your house to see you to-day, and I noticed that your wife referred to you as the head of the family." Wilkins : "H'm! You called to collect a bill, I gather!"

YOUNG Brown is asking everybody what he shall call his new baby." "Better call it Gimlet." "Gimlet! Why, who ever heard of such a name?" "Well, he's an awful little bore!"

NEWRICH : "I'm going to plant a lot of shady trees near my house. What sort is best, do you think?" Bansom : "The shadiest kind of a tree I ever saw was that family tree of yours that you showed me the other day."

"I THINK," said the fat man at the breakfast-table the other morning, "that our landlady should commence proceedings against this coffee." "Why?" quavered the slim man, in an unguarded moment. "Because it refuses to settle."

"WHAT did you think of that cigar I gave you yesterday?" "Not much." "It cost me 10s." "How so?" "Why, it gave my wife the idea that the gas was leaking somewhere, and she sent for a plumber."

JINKS : "What is the idea of sending your family away?" Winks : "For their summer holiday." "But you're staying behind yourself?" "Well, hang it all! I guess I want a holiday as well as they do."

Mrs. TIMMUS : "I hear your cook has left you. What was the trouble?" Mrs. Rockwell : "Our kitchen is so small that she had to put her bicycle in the cellar, and she thought the dampness wasn't good for it."

FIRST CITIZEN : "Hi, there! you'll get run over by that electric." Second Citizen : "Well, there's no disgrace in that. If I try to dodge it, I'll be sure to be thrown down by a bicycle, and that's adding insult to injury."

Mr. GLADSTONE told the story of a farmer who, after hearing a red hot sermon of never-ending fire and brimstone, consoled his wife quite sincerely with the n. i. c. remark,—"Never mind, Sally; that must be wrong; no constituency could stand it."

MR. GRUBBS : "I don't see why you should spend such a pile for clothes." Mrs. Grubbs : "I always supposed men liked to see a woman well dressed." Mrs. Grubbs : "They do—when some other man pays the bills."

"WHAT is an anarchist?" "An anarchist is one who howls, who has no regard for authority, and who incoherently gabbles night and day." "Yes; we have one at our house." "What's his name?" "Isn't named yet. He's our baby."

FATHER : "Well, Johnny, did your teacher tell you how you might be a happy boy if you wished?" Johnny (who has been to a Sunday-school tea meeting) : "Oh, yes, papa!" He said : "Now, boys, all of you eat as much as ever you like."

A WAG the other day asked his friend, "How many knaves do you suppose live in this street beside yourself?" "Besides myself!" replied the other; "do you mean to insult me?" "Well, then," said the first, "how many do you reckon including yourself?"

MAID : "Mem, the baby has gone off, and nobody has seen him for an hour; and, mem, he left the gate wide open after him." Mistress : "Gracious! Left the gate open? Then Fido has probably run away, and just as like as not I shall never see the dear thing again."

"HENRY," she said, disconsolately, "you didn't give me a birthday gift." "By Jove, that's so," said Henry; "but, you see, you always look so young that I can't realize that you ever had birthdays." Then she was happy, and hemmed the mean, subtle smile of a man who has saved money.

ALICE : "I heard a very pretty compliment for you to-day." George : "What was it?" Alice : "Mr. Thurston, the jeweller, said you were one of the best judges of diamonds in this city." George : "May I buy a nice solitaire for the third finger of your left hand?" Alice : "Oh, George! what made you think of such a thing? Well, if you want to."

THE steward of one of the European steamers, who wanted to take a box ashore unobserved said to a custom-house officer whom he knew,—"If I was to put a half-eagle piece upon each of your eyes, could you see?" The answer was,—"No; and if I had another upon my mouth, I could not speak."

AN old Scotch minister was often obliged to avail himself of the aid of probationers. One day a young man, vain of his oratorical powers, officiated, and on descending from the desk, was met by the elder with extended hands, and, accepting high praise, he said: "No compliments, I pray." "Na, na, na," said the minister, "nobody I'm glad o' anybody."

ADVERTISING AGENT : "Your pardon for intruding, madam, but I understand that you have been sick, and are now perfectly well, and that during your illness six bottles of Dr. Carew's Elixir was bought at the corner drug store." Madam : "Yes. The nurse who came to take care of me got sick, and ordered the bottles for herself. I did not take any of it." "Humph! Can I see her?" "She's dead."

A LITTLE boy was advised by his father to use illustrations in his converse whenever they should occur to him. "For," continued the parent, "there is no more forcible way of conveying or impressing your meaning. Shortly after the boy was being lectured on generosity. "It's better to give than to receive, Johnny—for better." "Illustrate it, papa. I think I shall understand it better."

BROTHER HENRY (home from the Wild West, rushing wildly into the breakfast-room, revolver in hand) : "Where are the accursed Apaches? I heard their war-whoops outside the house just now. Don't be scared, Jim. I've met them before, so leave the rascals to me!" Voices Outside : "Mawnin' peepins! Yeztree! Speashill! Strawbawerier—tuppence a bawkie! Yer-yer! Yeztree Speashill!" Brother Henry : "No, these are not Apaches, Henry, only the craters and paper-boys. This is England, you know."

## A NEW SHAMPOO FOR THE HAIR.

Extract from letter in the "HEARTH & HOME" issue, dated Aug. 4th, 1898.

"If you want a bright, well-kept head of hair, follow the directions given in this article. You will not only save your shilling, and the cold generally caught after shampooing, but the condition of your hair in a short time will delight you."

Here is the recipe, *a la* cookery books. Required a 1/4-jar of Calvert's Carbolic Soft Soap (from any Chemist or Stores), two large wash-hand basins, a pint of boiling rain-water. Put one ounce of the soap in each basin, pour on the boiling water, half a pint to each basin. Beat the soap to a strong froth with a brush; the suds should half fill the basin. The hair must be quite free from tangles. Wash first in one basin, rubbing the scalp well. Squeeze the soap out; it should be quite thick and creamy. Then wash again in second basin, rubbing the roots as before. Squeeze out as dry as possible. Roll the hair up in a rough towel, turban fashion, and leave for ten or fifteen minutes. This is to absorb the remaining suds. Then let the hair down, and shake in front of a good fire, or in the sun, according to the season. Do not touch with brush or comb till bone dry. Then begin at the ends with a large comb, and very gently get all the tangles out; there will be very few, as the hair has not been rubbed at all. You will find then that every hair is separate, and shining, and exquisitely soft to the touch. This is not to be believed without a trial, but in the case of washing woollen articles, too, if washed and rinsed in soap suds they are soft and fluffy as new, and do not shrink either. As the soap suds evaporate from the hair entirely, there can be no stickiness. This unorthodox method of shampooing was discovered in our family by accident, through the laziness of a nursery governess, who washed the children's hair with soft soap, and did not rinse the suds out. The result was so astonishing we have used the same method ever since, with the best results, on babies and grown-ups alike."

The reason for using the carbolic soap especially is that there seems something in the carbolic, or foundation of the soap, that acts wonderfully on the colour, quality, and growth of the hair. If there is a touch of gold, or bronze, hidden away it all comes out brightly, and fair or auburn heads, with anything in the way of curls or waves, look a glory after washing in this way. Leaving the soap to dry on the soap seems to nourish the roots, acting in the same way as manure for green things, in fact; and by brushing the hair from the roots the day after washing any dry soap will brush out, leaving the skin beautifully clean."

Illustrated List of Calvert's Carbolic Preparations post free on application.

F. C. CALVERT & CO., P.O. BOX 518, MANCHESTER.

## SOCIETY.

It is said that Princess Eva of Battenberg, who was born in 1887, is the only Royal child born in Scotland for nearly 300 years—that is since the birth of Charles I., in 1600.

The Dowager Queen of Holland had a pretty long Regency, quite equal to many a King's reign, and will occupy a conspicuous niche in Dutch history. Instead of counting among ordinary consorts and mothers of sovereigns, Her lot has been infinitely more comfortable than that of her contemporary, the Queen Regent of Spain.

FASHION says our fans are growing larger, and in the very near future the old-time immense fans will be the proper thing. For several years the pretty soft ostrich fans have been bidding away as out-of-date, but you may now bring them out as being quite the latest and newest thing, and air them on the very swellest occasions with the greatest assurance of being correct. Gauze fans of black with white lace are still good, and withal the spangled fans hold their own. Hand-painted fans, with figures in continental costumes, are used. Japanese embroidered ones on gauze are particularly handsome, while the thirty-five-cent paper fan is dainty and dressy.

The Prince and Princess of Wales have now made definite arrangements to have another home in Norfolk. Princess Victoria of Wales has set her heart on living now and then in the beautiful Cromer district, and it has accordingly been decided to build a residence at Overstrand for the use of the Prince of Wales's family. It is on Overstrand that one looks down upon the Lighthouse Hills over which Princess Victoria is so fond of roaming, and as it contains but three or four shops and at most some fifty houses, it is tolerably secluded. The house, we hear, will be quite small, and will be at once put in hand, as the health of Princess Victoria continues to be unsatisfactory, and as she seems better in the Cromer air than elsewhere, it is desirable that the Royal residence should be proceeded with as speedily as possible.

THE Queen has commanded that after this year the apartments at Windsor shall be open to the public on Wednesdays as well as on other days—that is to say, visitors will be admitted on six days in the week, Sundays being, of course, always excepted. The avowed reason for closing the apartments on Wednesdays has been that a day was needed for cleaning, but as the rooms are only open from eleven in the morning to four in the afternoon there is ample time for cleaning and dusting, either in the evening or early in the morning. It is merely a matter of arrangement, and it is pleasant to find that our Sovereign has issued this new order for the convenience and gratification of her subjects.

THE Emperor and Empress of Germany begin their journey by a visit to Constantinople, seeing its wonderful sights, reviews, &c., this being the Empress's first visit to that fascinating city. They will then sail for Haifa, which will be reached on October 26th, and thence they will travel by road to Jerusalem, the Kaiser on a splendid white mule presented by the Sultan, and the Kaiserin in a carriage. Thus they will travel everywhere in the Holy Land, and not by rail. The first night camp will be pitched at Cesarea, the second at Jaffa, and the third midway between the port and the Holy City. On October 29th the Imperial cavalcade will enter Jerusalem amidst a military display and pageant, and the tents of the Kaiser and Kaiserin and *cavouage*—about three hundred persons—will be pitched on the site granted for the buildings of the Lutheran Church. Then follows an excursion to Jericho, the Dead Sea, and the Jordan, whence, in accordance with an ancient custom, water will be brought for the baptism of future infant Hohenzollerns. On November 5th the return journey to the coast will commence, with halts at Mount Tabor, Nazareth and Tiberias. On November 10th the Imperial travellers will re-embark on the *Hohenzollern*, which will sail for Beyrouth, whence they will travel by the new railway built by a French company to Damascus and Bashee.

## STATISTICS.

ABOUT one-half of the population of Greece are agriculturists and shepherds.

FIGURES were used by the Arabian Moors about 900, and were introduced into Spain in 1000, and into England in 1253.

IT is said that over 500,000 rose-trees are annually imported into America from England, France, and Holland.

The bank cheques passing through the Clearing Houses in London and New York in one month exceed the value of all the gold and silver coin in the world.

NEARLY 100,000 pounds of snails are sold daily in the Paris markets to be eaten by dwellers in Paris. They are carefully reared for the purpose in extensive snail-gardens in the provinces, and fed on aromatic herbs to make their flavour finer.

## GEMS.

We know accurately only when we know little; with knowledge doubt increases.

It is upon smooth ice we slip; the rough path is safest for the feet.

STRONG thoughts are iron nails driven in the mind that nothing can draw out.

BLESSED is he who has found his work. Let him ask no other blessedness; he has a life purpose. Labour is life.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MUFFINS.—Beat one pint of flour into three gills of milk, add a tablespoonful of butter, melted, half a teaspoonful of salt and an even teaspoonful of baking powder. Mix well, and bake in muffin rings on a hot griddle.

FRENCH TOAST.—Cut slices of bread moderately thick, dip first in milk, then in beaten egg, to which a pinch of salt is added; turn them so that all parts will be covered with milk and egg, and fry both sides a golden brown in butter. Serve hot.

CLAM SOUP.—Chop fine twenty-five small clams and put to drain. Pare three potatoes and chop fine. Put them on to boil with one quart of milk in a double boiler. Rub together half a cup of butter with two large tablespoonsfuls of flour, and, after the potatoes and milk have boiled for fifteen minutes, add the mixture to them and cook for eight minutes longer. Chop enough parsley to fill a tablespoon and stir into the soup with pepper and salt to taste. Add the chopped clams and cook for one minute. Serve at once.

MILK TOAST.—To two cups scalded (not boiled) milk (if there is a scum it must be removed), stir in a paste made of a scant tablespoonful and a half of flour wet in a little cold water. Add to the flour while dry a saltspoonful of salt. Mix the paste with the milk and cook in a double boiler, stirring constantly until as thick as cream. When about done add a piece of butter the size of a walnut. The bread toasted dry should be dipped into the sauce, each slice remaining until tender. Then pile upon a dish and pour over the whole whatever sauce is left.

FRESH TOMATO SALAD.—Fresh tomatoes may be had all the season, and sweetbread or nut salad is exceedingly fine served in them. Select small, firm tomatoes of equal size, peel them and cut a slice from the stem end, remove the seeds and fill the tomato with the prepared salad, letting it come above the tomato. Cover with mayonnaise dressing, and place each tomato on a lettuce leaf. Hard-boiled eggs cut into small pieces and the white hearts of lettuce shredded and mixed with a mayonnaise dressing, is another delicious filling for tomatoes.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

CAKES are made in Mexico from the eggs of two kinds of water-insects.

THE bittern, contrary to general belief, still abounds in many parts of this country, where it is shot and eaten.

THE Japanese have three forms of salutation—one for saluting an inferior, one for saluting an equal, and another for saluting a superior.

The occupants of the Philippines represent such a variety of races that thirty-one languages are spoken there.

THE Russian soldiers invariably wash and dress with extra care before a battle, as they believe physical cleanliness to play an important part in helping them to enter Heaven.

BACTERIA multiply very rapidly, and they do it in a very curious way. A single one breaks itself in two, then each half grows until it becomes as large as the original.

AMONG the many mysteries of bird migration is the fact that over-sea journeys are generally conducted in the darkness, and invariably against a head wind.

A FAVOURITE mode of suicide among the African tribes who dwell near Lake Nyassa is for a native to wade into the lake and calmly wait for a crocodile to open his mouth and swallow him.

THE oldest love letter in the world is in the British Museum. It is a proposal of marriage for the hand of an Egyptian princess, and it was made 3,500 years ago. It is in the form of an inscribed brick.

THE lamp mostly used in Africa is a simple contrivance. In a coconut-shell filled with palm-oil a bit of rag is placed to serve as a wick, and this gives all the light that the native requires.

AMONG the curiosities of the gold-mining region is a gold-mining boat. The craft is supplied with a dredge, with which the beds of the gold-bearing rivers are brought to the surface and washed for the precious metal.

BURMESE women do not smoke cigarettes, but cheroots, the Burmese substitute for cigars. It is a curious and very picturesque sight to see one of these Burmese girls in the enjoyment of her cheroot. The greater number of them choose one that is fully 10 in. in length, and green, and in a day they smoke many of them.

A CURIOUS mode of catching turtle is practised in the West Indies. It consists in attaching a ring and a line to the tail of a species of sucker-fish, which is then thrown overboard, and immediately makes for the first turtle he can spy, to which he attaches himself very firmly by means of a sucking apparatus arranged on the top of his head. The fisherman then hauls both turtle and sucking-fish in.

ON all the postage stamps of Guatemala is engraved a somewhat distorted representation of the quetzal, which is rightly called the bird of liberty, as it dies almost immediately when captured. So extreme is its love of freedom that if captured and in a few seconds restored to liberty it would seem as if the contamination of the hand could not be removed, and it will drop lifeless after flying but a few yards. If it is caught in a trap it is always found dead, and when the young are taken from the nest they die at once. It is found only in a small portion of the country, and is seldom seen alive, since it cannot be kept long in captivity. It is a bird of beautiful plumage, having two extremely long tail feathers and a superbly crested head. It is said that its pride in its tail feathers is greater than its love of life, for if one of them accidentally becomes broken the bird goes to its nest and dies from grief and mortification. It builds a round-roofed nest, having two holes on opposite sides, so that the quetzal literally "goes in at one door and out at the other," and thus avoids any necessity for tall-breaking, and consequent heart-breaking, by never turning round in order to make its exit from the nest.

NEXT WEEK.

NEXT WEEK.

## FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

## FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

## FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

We have much pleasure in announcing that we have again secured the services of a Writer whose Stories have been very popular and highly appreciated by our Readers in the past, and that next week we shall publish the Opening Chapters of

## FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

This Story will be found equal to the best Stories that have appeared in our columns, and we feel confident that it will be eagerly read by all our Readers.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

K. M.—Any surgical instrument maker's.

REBELLIOUS.—You could be imprisoned for contempt.

PETER.—Application should be made to the Home Office.

COOK.—You can do it either in milk or in a good meat stock.

ALFRED J.—Everything depends on the amount of your income.

BROTHER.—A stamped receipt is required for any payment over £2.

TENANT.—If you pay rent by the week, a week's notice is sufficient.

GAMMY FOOT.—Fourpenny bits began to be called in by Government in 1866.

CONSTANT READER.—It might be done, but the expense and trouble would be considerable.

PUZZLED.—Bank of England notes are numbered backward—from 10,000, hence the figures 00,001.

ANIMAL LOVERS.—Zoologists say that all known species of wild animals are gradually diminishing in size.

PAY.—The jury in a murder trial do not separate until the verdict is given, or they are discharged.

OLD SALM.—The title "admiral" originally came from an Arabic phrase meaning "ruler of the sea."

ELENA.—A step-sister is the offspring of different parents; a half-sister of the same father or mother.

ROULME.—Put some powdered sulphur in its food, and well dress its coat every morning with a hard brush.

DON.—The subject is too extensive; if you will refer to any good cyclopaedia you will find it treated in several pages.

HONEYMOON.—Presents given in contemplation of marriage may be recovered through the County Court if the engagement is broken off.

HIGHLAND FROG.—We are unable to say who is the author, or where the poem could be obtained. Should any of our readers inform us hereon they would oblige F. R. G.

E. D.—Emily and Amelia are not different forms of one name. Emily is from *Aemilia*, the name of an Etruscan gens. Amelia comes from the Gothic amalia, heavenly.

POOR MOTHER.—Write to your son's commanding officer, stating the circumstances under which he had enlisted, and it is very probable that he will be released.

JESSEN.—A gentleman may bring an action for breach of promise of marriage against a lady; but the probability is that a jury would only give him a farthing damages.

EXPERIMENTALIST.—Fly paper is made by painting pieces of paper with Venice turpentine from chesterfield; sometimes the lure is made more attractive by mixing honey or treacle with it.

YOUNG HOSTESS.—An imperturbable calm and a ready tact are the two important factors in the making of a model hostess. Secure these and you need never fear for the success of any of your entertainments.

BALD PATE.—The purest paraffin oil can be got from any chemist; it should be rubbed into the scalp either with a small sponge or finger tips, as you suggest, and ought to be continued for a fortnight at least before being discarded in favour of another application.

STAY-AT-HOME.—You may enter Canada at any port as freely and unquestioned as you might enter Glasgow or the port of London; regulations you hint at are in force in United States ports only.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.—Seventeen is much too young for a girl to marry, and you would be doing very wrong. From twenty to twenty-four is the best age for a girl to marry.

TOM'S DARLING.—It would be foolish for you to marry or even become engaged to a young man who has no visible means of support or the prospect of ever being able to earn more than enough to keep himself in the poorest fashion.

## OLD-FASHIONED ROSES.

THEY ain't no style about 'em.  
And they're sort o' pale and faded;  
Fit the door-way here, without 'em,  
Would be lonesome and shaded  
With a good 'eal blocker shades,  
Than the mornin'-glories makes,  
And the sunshines would look sadder  
For their good old-fashion' askes.

I like 'em 'cause they kind o'  
Sort o' makes a fellor like 'em;  
And I tell you when I find a  
Bunch out whar the sun kin strike 'em,  
It allus sets me thinkin'  
O' the ones 'at used to grow  
And peep in thro' the chinkin'  
O' the cabin, don't you know.

And then I think o' mother,  
And how she used to love 'em,  
When they woun't any other,  
Lees she found them up above 'em!  
And her eyes, afore she shut 'em,  
Whispered with a smile, and said  
We mabe pick a bunch and put 'em  
In her hand when she was dead.

But, as I was a sayin',  
They ain't no style about 'em,  
Vonquid or displayin',  
But I woun't be without 'em,  
Cause I'm happier in these posies,  
And the hollyhocks and such,  
Then the hummin' bird 'at noses  
In the roses of the rich.

MAGGIE.—The materials best suited for removing paint stains from carpet are benzine and chloroform; get a small quantity of first-named from chemist, dip rag into it and rub stain; you may find it beneficial afterwards to give dirty spots in carpets a rub with Cheever's carpet soap.

ALICE MAY.—Some thin bread and butter, some tomatoes; skin the tomatoes by dipping them a moment in boiling water; cut them in thin slices and put them neatly on one slice of buttered bread; sprinkle over a little pepper and salt and a pinch of fine sugar, put another slice on top and press it down a little with the knife; cut it in four pieces and serve; this is a delightful sandwich at present, and most wholesome.

IN TROUBLE.—We strongly advise that you should let the lad remain where he is; his health will be promoted; the deficiency he labours under in great part removed; we do not doubt, and in a few years he will come back with settled disposition, which is what he does not possess now. If now sent home you could have no guarantee that he would not go off somewhere else the next week; he has a roving mind.

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The figures to be used are 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9. Place one of these figures in each of the squares (keeping the 5 in centre), to count 15 each way, from left to right, top to bottom, and corner to corner.


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MAKE 15  
EACH  
WAY?

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